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AGES, SAINTS AND RUNACHALA RAMANA

Agavan Priya Ma F. Taleyarkhan



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Sages, Saints and Arunachala Ramana

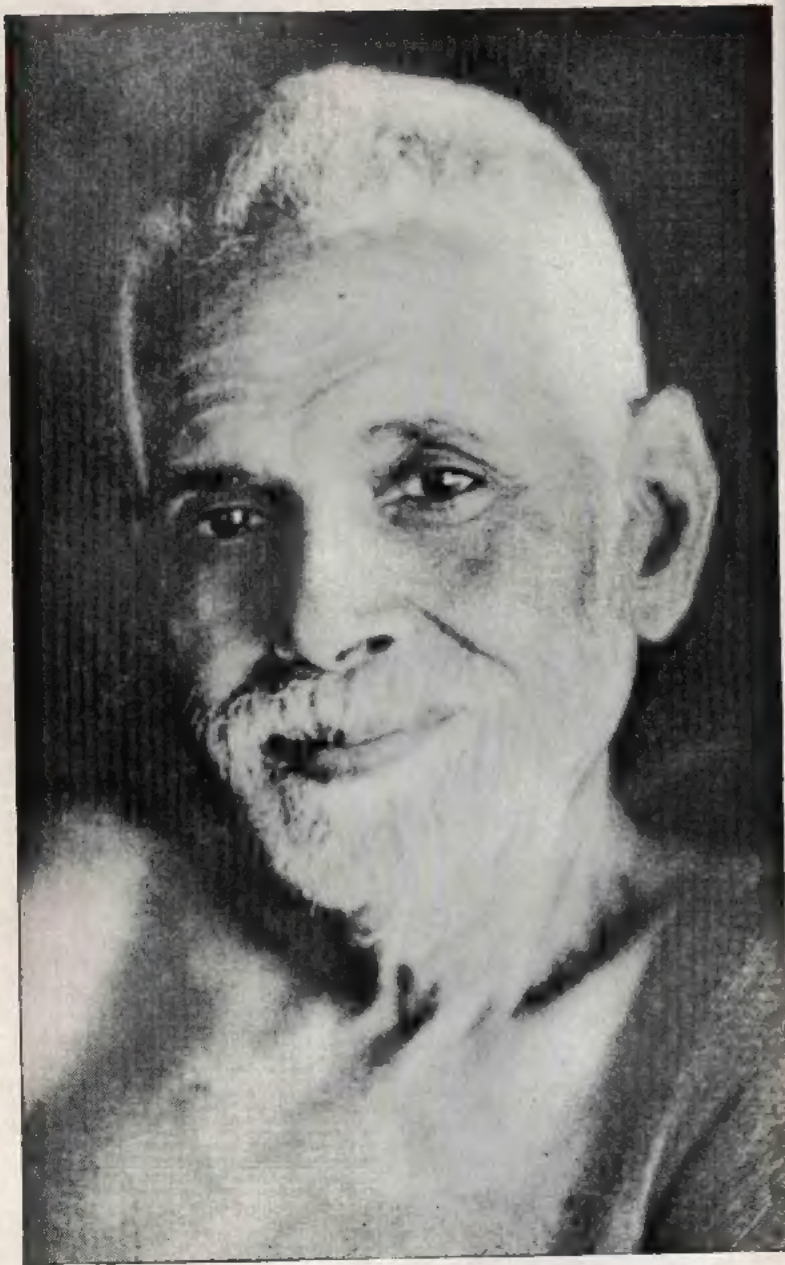
By
Bhagavan Priya
Ma F. Taleyarkhan

Foreword by:
Dr. S. Radhakrishnan

Introduction by:
Shri Sri Prakasa



Orient Longmans



BHAGAVAN RAMANA

To
My Lord Ramana of Arunachala and
Gracious Ma Ananda Mayi this book
is dedicated with love and devotion

FOREWORD

I have known Srimathi Feroza Taleyarkhan for many years and as far back as 1939 I had asked her to write her memoirs. Born in one well-to-do Parsee family and married into another, yet she has been from her childhood interested in the life of the spirit. She has been in contact with many persons of saintly disposition and for 32 years she served Shri Ramana Maharshi faithfully. She has converted his birth place into a temple and built guest houses.

I am glad she has now decided to write her memoirs and I am sure this will be of great interest. I wish her well.

"Girija"

30 Edward Elliot Road,
Mylapore, Madras-4.

S. RADHAKRISHNAN

INTRODUCTION

It is an unfortunate fact that we in India very greatly lack the historical sense. In fact, we had forgotten our own history, and the great figures of the past were mere faint names for us, when European scholars with great patience and industry, recovered our past for us, and made us proud of the great men and women who had played their part in the evolution of our country in the various departments of its national life. We cannot be sufficiently grateful to them for the work they have done for us.

Very few of us write diaries. These diaries are really valuable documents, and enable future generations not only to learn of individual lives, but also about social life, economic conditions and the religious aspirations of the times in which those lived who have left these diaries behind. The art of biography is practically unknown to us, and so we know little of our ancestors. The thought of writing an autobiography comes only to very few in the land, and so when I come across the biography or autobiography of any person, I feel happy. This has so much to teach me.

I, therefore, felt very happy when I learnt from Mrs. Feroza Taleyarkhan of Maharshi Ramanashram at Tiruvannamalai, (Tamil Nadu) that she was writing her autobiography, and I felt doubly happy later when she sent me her typescript, and asked me to write an Introduction to her book.

Readers will agree with me that it is a profoundly interesting piece of writing. Mrs. Taleyarkhan's style is simple, and she has opened her heart and mind in a free and frank spirit for all to read, appreciate, understand and profit by. The book expresses the author's intense love for all, and her spirit of great devotion and

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dedication to her spiritual masters. In life she has always been ready to extend her affection and sympathy to individuals in physical or spiritual distress. Her book gives many examples of how she came to the succour of those who needed her care and attention.

Though I am sorry that I never had the privilege of meeting Ramana Maharshi of whom I had heard so much, I was glad to have had an opportunity of visiting his famous ashram at Tiruvannamalai when I happened to be Governor of Madras. I went there at the invitation of Mrs. Taleyarkhan who took me round the place, and told me a great deal of her Master from her own personal knowledge and experience.

She has put all her experiences very vividly in her biography. Apart from her great devotion to the Maharshi and the life at his ashram, she has also told us a good many things about herself. Born in an orthodox Parsi family, she tells us of her early life, her parents and relatives, the atmosphere that prevailed in the home, her education and a number of things that it is necessary to know to understand how the good Parsi people lived in the early years of the century.

Though born in a very wealthy family and having all the world's goods at her disposal, it is clear from her writing that she had a spiritual bent of mind from the start. The family did not satisfy her and she had her difficulties and differences with her servants, husband and son. Her soul yearned for something very much more than what the home could give. Curiously enough, though belonging to the Zoroastrian faith, she tells us how she was attracted to the various founders and prophets of other faiths and was equally at home with Christian Saints, Muslim Pirs, Buddhist Bhikkhus and Hindu Sadhus. The two great spiritual figures that have most influenced her life and thought are Maharshi Ramana and Anandamayi Ma. She tells us a great deal about them in her book, and it is delightful to read all that she has to say about them. She too like others has had to face disappointments and frustrations at the hands of fellow humans who should have known better. But she has borne all with courage and fortitude, and always maintained her poise and equilibrium. Her great faith in God and her masters has helped her to face all obstacles and keep herself unruffled and unaffected.

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She has always kept in touch with persons in all walks of life, high and humble alike, and she has met a large number of notable persons in the land. Her short sketches of them are most instructive, interesting and entertaining. On the whole the book makes delightful reading, and I do hope it will attract the attention of large numbers of persons who, I am sure, will greatly profit from all that she has to say about herself and her own experiences of life.

Sri Prakasa

'Sevashrama'

Sigra,

Varanasi-1,

22nd February, 1970.

PROLOGUE

These pages contain my experiences in spiritual life. If even a few of the readers of this book take to the path of divine on the perusal of the contents herein, the friends who persuaded me or rather compelled me to write this book, will be more than rewarded.

I was most fortunate and privileged to have very intimate contact with such a teacher like the great Ramana Maharshi. Such a spiritual teacher is very difficult to find especially in this dark age. My memories of the long years spent in the presence of my Lord Ramana are so vivid that it is difficult for me to believe that they are real. It was a glorious *Lila* of His. What a wonderful grace of God He was to our country, in the present days of chaos, disaster and turmoil. Ramana was like a great Rishi of the ancient times. He was born for removal of human ignorance and putting an end to human misery. My Gracious Bhagavan's most sunny and glorious smile and his sweet mellow voice used to calm our depressed souls and inspire us with a wonderful hope and feeling.

After Bhagavan's *Mahasamadhi* I always felt that my time too was almost over. I have nothing left with me now, except the holy and the loving name of my Lord Ramana. It is my only consolation and a thing of interest to me in my life.

I have been impelled, my dear friends, to write this book, so that the readers may know about the life in the Ashram, the *Sadhana* and they may also come to know that the life is not a bed of roses.

My Lord Ramana was the true spiritual home, who brushed aside all the questions of discord and difficulties, by his single look, flooding the persons around with light and joy. Any words that His lips uttered kept one spell-bound and made one forget all ill

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effects of the useless and harmful talk one heard outside in the Ashram in His absence. Merely sitting in His presence was to get oneself spiritually uplifted.

Dear friends and readers will come to know how from time to time, different sages came to rescue me after my Lord Ramana left His body.

I am highly grateful to my very dear spiritual friends Dr. S. Radhakrishnan for writing a learned Foreword and Shri Sri Prakasa for writing an Introduction to this humble booklet of a modest *Sadhaka* like me.

I am most indebted to dear S. Kuppuswami. It was he who succeeded after 30 years of persuading me to write. He actually took it up after the great successful *Kumbhabhishekam* of *Patala Linga* temple on 3rd November, 1968. The work was started from 10th November, 1968; he worked hard, day and night, with such love and care, and had it not been for his zest, who knows if this book would have been out? Any amount of thanks is not enough for his loving work. Bless him.

I am also thankful to dear Rasna Dalal and Miss Villi Jamshedji for all their kindness and help.

I cannot conclude without my final thanks to Mr. C. M. Salis, Mr. R. Soundararajan and Mr. P. S. Ramaswamy of the staff of Orient Longmans without whose kindness and cooperation, I do not think I would have brought out this book. May God's blessings be on them all.

It will be ingratitude on my part if I do not mention the most important person, Mr. M. Swaminathan of Amra Press, Madras, who has helped me in printing this book. With all his work, he has done me a great favour, and before I closed my eyes, he finished the book.

Ma. F. Taleyarkhan.

PREFATORY NOTE

This book is just a personal narrative, drawing on my memories of a few sages and saints it was my privilege to meet. It has, if I may say so, no axes to grind. Autobiographies suffer from several disadvantages but principally from that of being regarded as exercises in self-projection prompted by inordinate vanity. Often enough they tend to present events and men from so subjective a standpoint that a great many of them may well be classed with fiction. I trust these few pages will not incur any of these charges. I have tried to tell an unvarnished tale and not to indulge in self-justification or in exaggerated self-projection. I have, however, let my feelings and enthusiasms show through for else, there would be no point in my putting pen to paper at all. I can also claim, most truthfully, that the idea of writing this book was not mine but Dr. Radhakrishnan's. Those who have had the good fortune to count this truly great man as a friend will realise the difficulty of treating lightly, even out of modesty, a suggestion from a sincere seeker of the good in all human beings. I hope the story of my transformation from an affluent socialite of Bombay's Parsi community into an earnest devotee of Bhagavan Ramana will help others to put away childish things and seek to know the Self.

Ma. F. Taleyarkhan.

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I

GLIMPSES INTO MY PERSONAL LIFE

Introduction—Parentage—My stay in Karachi—Visit to a Muslim Saint—My Sadhana put to a test—Tulja Bhavani's wonderful image—Holy Mother Barbara and my education—My operation—Kindness of Shri Rajaji—Kalyana Kalpataru—Precious presents from Bhagavan—My loneliness after the Mahanirvana of Bhagavan—Bhagavan's personal assurance—Memories of F. S. Taleyarkhan—My husband's activities—Differences of opinion with my husband—My husband's death—About Dr. Wanless and Dr. Vail—Sohrab's birth—Sohrab comes to the Ashram—'Mother,...you are right'—Visit to St. Alphonso—Sister Rita and her husband visit the Ramanashram—My mother gets a direct experience.

Introduction

Several friends suggested to me that I should get down in book form the various experiences I have had in my life. I was particularly exhorted to do this by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. But I have maintained no diary or notes of the events of my life. The stories recorded in these pages were originally recounted by me to Mrs. Mason of Australia, Shri Devaraja Mudaliar, Shri B. K. Shah and several other friends on various occasions. I am no writer and make no pretence to literary gifts of any kind. My devotion to Bhagavan alone has urged me to record these experiences in my spiritual quest. I feel certain that He is guiding me as I set down a few of these personal memories. I shall feel amply rewarded if these pages serve to help and guide others in their quest for the true happiness that comes from the realization of the spirit in man.

Parentage

I was born in an affluent Parsi family well settled in what was then the Presidency of Bombay. My father had considerable

properties in both Surat and Poona. My grandfather was an Officer in the service of H.E.H. the Nizam of Hyderabad. My father too joined the Nizam's service. He was the eldest son of his parents. He had a younger brother who passed away at a very young age. My mother was Shirinbai, the daughter of Bhikaji Patel. She was a very beautiful woman, blessed with long, luxurious black hair reaching down to her ankles, and large black eyes. We were a large family, five sisters and two brothers, the eldest being my brother. I was born on 24th December, 1898, in Hyderabad-Deccan, on the anniversary day of my grandmother (Piroja Patel) and was given her name. My childhood was on the whole uneventful except that I seem to have been seriously ill in the very first year of my life and to have survived the illness more through the devotion and prayers of my parents than through the skill of medical attendants of those days.

My stay in Karachi

My father's aunt, his mother's sister, had married rather late in life a very rich gentleman of Karachi. Being childless she asked my father to let me stay with her. I was accordingly brought up by her for quite a few years as her own child. I was admitted to a Gujarati School there, and my uncle and aunt had a great many plans for me — even for my marriage to a wealthy gentleman who later became a renowned Congress leader. They wanted to celebrate my *Navjote* ceremony on a grand scale, according to their ideas and plans. They desired my parents to execute a written document, renouncing all their rights as parents in me in their favour. But some differences developed between my parents on the one hand and my aunt and uncle on the other, and in the end after the *Navjote* ceremony was over, my parents did not allow me to go back to Karachi with my aunt. This parting from my foster parents caused me great grief, because I had learnt to love them deeply. I had a similar bond of love for my servants, friends and relations at Karachi. Love has been

the keynote of my existence in all my life. I feel this is a step towards heaven. Real poverty is not the poverty of material wealth, but the lack of love for fellow beings, the lack of kindness according to me. Kind thoughts are of God and flow from Him. My love of Bhagavan Himself was prompted not because He was a *Jivanmukhta* but because He represented to me the very embodiment of Love — in its finest, purest and noblest aspects.

Visit to a Muslim Saint

My grandfather had a vast, spacious house, rather like a fort. In this large ancestral house in Surat, my father, Kruchshaw E. Mody, would rise to the music of the Nagara. My house was known as the house of the Khan Bahadurs. Simple, honest and straightforward, my father was well-known for his integrity and character and faithfulness in carrying out the orders of his superiors while in service, and was most esteemed on this account. He was truthful, incorruptible and absolutely honest in all his dealings. Deeply religious by nature, he was not only tolerant but respected other religions to the extent of helping financially in renovating dilapidated temples and Mazars. He had varied experiences in his long life as a high official in the service of H.E.H. the Nizam of Hyderabad. While on tour of the district under his charge, my parents used a tonga, since cars were unknown in those days. The horses my father had were generally pure white in colour. On one occasion while father was on tour, he was passing through some jungle and the orderly informed my father that a great Muslim saint was nearby, and inquired if he would like to visit him. Father, always punctual in keeping his appointments, did not like the idea of breaking his appointment with the patwaris and peshkars, awaiting him at the place he had scheduled to visit, and refused to go to see the saint. But he had hardly proceeded about a mile further on, when the tonga they were travelling in broke down inevitably causing delay in their onward journey. The orderly had to

go to a nearby village to produce another tonga. My father then thought of calling on the Muslim saint, the orderly had earlier spoken of. When my parents went to him they were warmly received by the tall, white-haired, grave-looking saint. He greeted my father with the words: "You had to come even if you did not want to, as food had already been cooked for you." My mother was greatly attracted to this saint who reminded her of Christ in his long loose robes and beard and was greatly pleased to be told by the saint that she would be blessed with five children and she could meet several of God's good men in life. All of which has proved true.

My Sadhana put to a Test

In his last days, my father was suffering from cancer. He was operated on by Dr. Parmar of Bombay. One day the nurse attending on him suddenly wanted the doctor to be sent for urgently. It seemed to her that my father was going down fast after the operation. The good doctor, who was quite like a member of our family, confirmed the nurse's view on arrival. The thought then occurred to me in a flash that I should put my *sadhana* I had performed at Buddha Gaya for some years earlier to a test. I immediately took out my rosary and put it against my father's heart. Then I prayed in silence with eyes closed to the Lord Siddhartha and within a few minutes, father regained breath and pulse. The nurse told him that his daughter's prayers had revived him. My father embraced me and blessed me saying that I was more a son than a daughter to him and that I would achieve great things in life. Not only physically but in other respects also I resemble my father. Besides I am quite a headstrong and impulsive type, like my father. I hope I am as honest, straightforward and helpful as he. Father passed away eight days later on the 6th of January 1936 at the age of 68. My mother too gave me her blessings in similar terms towards the close of her life in February 1967. Perhaps these pages are more to my mother's blessings for though friends pressed me to set down my

experience as early as 1939, I was unable to do so till now.

Tulja Bhavani's Wonderful Image

So it happened that I returned to my parents at Tuljapur. This is a place notorious for its Bhils who had made a name for themselves as robbers. These primitive people before setting out on their nocturnal expeditions, worship the Goddess Tulja Bhavani. In due course the temple acquired my valuable and precious pieces of jewellery. My father who was the Collector of this place once asked us to get dressed in our finest for a visit to this temple. I did not relish the idea of visiting a place where they worshipped stone; nevertheless, we visited the temple more because we wanted to see the temple than because my father's commands had to be obeyed. There was considerable pomp and ceremony when we went to the temple. At the temple standing between my parents I peeped at the Devi through the interspace between them. What I saw was not the idol but a beautiful woman dressed in the finest jewels and silks, laughing kindly at me to tell me that She was not just a stone image but an actual living, powerful Being. Did the Devi mean to tell me that I was wrong when I told our Muslim ayah that it was pointless to go to see a stone image? But I was too dazed to talk and was silent. The look the Goddess gave me was such as to make me think that the Goddess was all love and that only women are capable of such love. I sometimes think that God can only be a woman, as no man is capable of such love.

On father's transfer from Tuljapur we came to Kandhar which is about 40/50 miles from Chaliagaon. It can be reached only by bullock cart. This place too was infested by Bhils. There we stayed for three years. A sister was born here and it fell to me to look after this infant sister. I was about 10 or 11 years of age when my mother fell seriously ill and had to be taken to Bombay for treatment. Mother was in Bombay for nearly ■ months and during this period I and my infant sister stayed with a friend of my father's. The other

children were quartered with other friends. I became the joy of this house as the grand old lady of the house had only grown-up children, four sons and a daughter, about 25 years of age. Maiji, as we called her, requested my father to leave me with her and he did. During this period something of an education was imparted to me by a private tutor who would come home for just an hour a day. My mother did not believe in such education for women and had not paid any attention to our studies when we were with her. My parents returned to Bombay two or three years later to consider offers for my marriage. They thought of a wealthy mill owner, while Maiji favoured a very smart and enlightened young man who visited her often. My mother did not like Maiji's choice as he was not as wealthy as the one she had in view. When I was consulted in the matter, I agreed with Maiji's choice and this made my mother rather cross with me. I got engaged to be married when I was about 12 or 13 years of age but the marriage ceremony itself was postponed, as he insisted that I must be well educated too, since all in their family were highly educated.

Holy Mother Barbara and my Education

During this period, I went on a visit to my maternal uncle—at Versova, some 30 miles from Bombay. We got into the train at Grant Road, and into our compartment came a grand old lady, a beautiful nun, who sat by my side and was shocked to learn that such a nice and beautiful child like myself had no formal schooling and could not talk in English. This mother was a forceful personality and talked to my parents in such a way that by the time she got off the train at Bandra she had persuaded my father to accompany her and see the convent school on the very day. Accordingly, we went there and saw the convent school and my father agreed to send me to that school. I and my sisters went there after a fortnight and were admitted to that school. Rita, being quite an infant then I had to be more a foster-mother to her.

Glimpses into my Personal Life

Reverend Mother Barbara, the nun who had met us on the train and was the cause of our entry into the convent, kindly arranged for me to be coached by another sister who was a former Italian princess, as I was considered too old to start my education from the lowest class. I was inconsolable when after about 2 years, Mother Barbara sent for me to tell me that she was being transferred to another convent and that another Mother Superior will be taking charge of the convent at Bandra. I refused to stay in that convent without Mother Barbara and so we came to the Byculia Convent where we were taken as parlour boarders. The Mother here was as fond of me as Mother Barbara had been and would often tell me that I belonged to her and not to the world. The love of Mother Barbara and of this Mother for me was such that I felt like becoming a nun. I felt myself extraordinarily lucky to be so loved by these saintly nuns.

My father told my fiance to hurry on with the wedding and it came off on 14th March 1914. My sister-in-law, Mrs. Meher F. S. Taleyarkhan, became a great friend and nearly another mother to me. Some unkind facts overtook my father and I had thereafter to look after my two sisters, one of whom got married in Bangalore to Dinna Belgaumwalla. After my wedding I was in great society entertaining and moving about in high circles, but inwardly I was not quite happy, my mind being not quite at ease with this way of life. I would often spend some time just sitting quiet and in prayer. This mood of mine could never be appreciated either by my husband or by any of my relations. When I commenced my *sadhana* at Buddha Gaya in 1928 and later on came to Ramanashram in 1937 the differences of outlook widened considerably. Although in society my friends were more loving, yet I was after inner freedom. Life is not meant to be hoarded — Life is meant to be given in love.

My Operation

I am uncertain what year it was, perhaps 1947, I was having

pains in my abdomen, which did not respond to the homeopathic remedies administered by my friend Mr. Cohen. So, with Bhagavan's permission, I went to Bangalore for examination and treatment at the Curzon Hospital there. X-ray diagnosis revealed a big lump on the left side. My friends, Doctors Wanless and Vail, had warned me earlier that the disease was likely to recur and spread. The doctors at this hospital in Bangalore did not however take me into their confidence in the matter of the diagnosis, but were arranging amongst themselves privately to perform another operation for the removal of this growth, and were consulting my friend Shri Mirza Raza in that regard.

Kindness of Shri Rajaji

Just about then a letter from Shri Rajaji, then Governor General, was redirected to me from Tiruvannamalai and in reply thereto I had informed him of my condition. So kind and solicitous of my welfare was Shri Rajaji that even when he occupied the highest position in India, he found time to write to the doctors in charge to bestow close attention on me even as if he himself were the patient. This letter came to the notice of the then Dewan of Mysore, Sir A. Ramaswami Mudaliar, and he visited me at the hospital. These factors made the doctors evince deep interest in my case. I was alone, none of my relations were at my bedside. This operation would be the eighth of a series of operations I had undergone in life. But the doctors encouraged me and made me feel quite at home in the hospital.

Suspecting that I may have to undergo this operation, I wrote to Bhagavan praying to Him to grant that I may close my eyes in peace rather than undergo this the eighth operation of a series. When this letter reached Bhagavan He read it as usual in the Old Hall and there He made kind mention of me to the people present. According to Bhagavan's directions, Mauni — bless his soul — wrote to ask me to come back to Tiruvannamalai assuring me that things would be all right.

The Dewan and the doctors all assured me that the operation arranged to take place within the next two days would relieve me of my pain and that I could go back, fit and healthy. I told them that I had decided against the operation and showed them the photo of Bhagavan which was on my table near the bed. He, I said, was my doctor and that in accordance with His directions, I would be returning to Tiruvannamalai without undergoing the operation. Dear reader, believe me that I, who for ten days earlier, could not retain any food, that day enjoyed toast and scrambled eggs without any pain or discomfort. That evening I attended a cinema show also with the matron of the hospital. When I approached the chief surgeon to take leave of him, he was pretty incredulous. He had again X-ray photos taken of me, but to his astonishment they did not show the growth where it had been located previously. Assuring the doctors that I would place myself at their disposal for treatment in case of the recurrence of the trouble, I returned to the ashram. Bhagavan's gracious smile on the day I returned to the ashram is still a priceless treasure in my memory. Nearly two decades have passed since then, and I have not had any recurrence of this particular trouble so far. Miraculous cures like mine by Bhagavan, may I say in all humility, were not uncommon.

Kalyana Kalpataru

"Perfection is the keynote of Yoga," says the Gita. In everything Bhagavan did, small or great, Bhagavan was ever perfect. Whether in effecting the cures as He did with me or in the culinary art at which He was a specialist, or in proof reading one could never find fault with anything Bhagavan did. So perfect was His work in all fields. Instances will recur to the memory of people who have known Bhagavan even slightly. I here recall two out of many within my knowledge. There was however, no attempt at perfection, perfection was quite natural to Him. He would hardly permit the waste of even trifles. Every little bit of anything

would be put to some use or other. His scrupulous care in handling any material he came across is worthy of emulation by us all.

I saw Bhagavan arranging the back numbers of the delightful journal devoted to spiritual matters — Kalyana Kalpataru — and instructing Madhava to get them bound neatly. Madhava had been trained by Bhagavan in doing this work to perfection so as to be the envy of every professional binder. A few days later I saw the neatly bound volume of this journal with Bhagavan expressing appreciation of the excellent work. I told Bhagavan of a set of copies with me of the same journal, which Bhagavan asked me to bring to Him. He returned them to me handsomely bound, a few days later. This volume, needless to say, is amongst my valued possessions.

Precious Presents from Bhagavan

Hard coconut shells are generally used in households as fuel and the ashes sometimes used for tooth powder. Bhagavan had other uses to put them to. He would take immense pains to clean up the strands of fibre on the shells, scrape and polish the surface inside and out and make ladles of them for use in the kitchen and for other purposes as well. I saw Bhagavan at such work with two shells and a few days later found them turned into very beautiful cups. This type of work was almost a hobby and a passionate one with Bhagavan. One of these shells was big and the other somewhat smaller. He took three or four days to polish these cups to His satisfaction. I was praying to have it. Sensing my desire to have it, He passed the smaller one on to me. I was thinking however of the other one too and although I never gave expression to my wish, He called me. "Ho, come here, take this," and gave the other one too to me — again possessions which I am never tired of showing to all my friends as the handiwork of Bhagavan for whom no work was too small and all work was sacred.

Close attention to detail, absence of hurry, perfection in every task attempted, and maximum utilisation of every bit of an article characterised Bhagavan. Nothing escaped Bhagavan's notice, even though He had shed His mortal coil. He seemed to be always on the alert to comfort and console His numerous devotees to wipe away the tears from their eyes.

My Loneliness after the Mahanirvana of Bhagavan

For over a week after Mahanirvana, I was quite desolate at missing the physical presence of Bhagavan and I did not know quite what to do. Between tears, thoughts of ending this life often came to my mind. My husband too was no more then and Bombay held no fascination for me.

Bhagavan's Personal Assurance

It happened one afternoon as I lay asleep that I had a dream. I was standing in the verandah of my house and I saw Bhagavan come down the Arunachala hill with His walking stick and *Kamandalu*, enter the verandah of my house by the side door. He came up to me and asked me, "Why are you weeping?" Tears welled up in my eyes, as I said I missed Bhagavan too deeply for words, Bhagavan bade me wipe my tears assuring me He was always with me here. Then He went out by the door opposite, crossing over the bodies of three or four people who were soundly asleep on the floor, whose identity to this day escapes me. This dream is yet vivid in my memory and were I an artist I would have drawn a picture of the scene. Bhagavan almost seemed to tell me that my place was at His ashram and my services in the interests of the ashram should continue. How can I tell my people that it is Bhagavan's will that makes me continue in residence here, despite the troubles that face me constantly? Some Muslim servants of mine who had protested against my visits to either the shrine or the ashram of Bhagavan or even of prostrating to the photo of Bhagavan, have been granted the vision of Bhagavan so

that they not only do not protest any longer but have themselves become devotees of Bhagavan.

Memories of Mr. F. S. Taleyarkhan

Phiroze Taleyarkhan was the youngest of three brothers and a sister, of a well-known aristocratic Parsi family. The eldest, Mr. F. S. Taleyarkhan was a barrister, and I loved him for the reason that he was not in love with money. As a barrister, he was more interested in bringing about a happy compromise between the contending parties than in dragging on litigation through the various courts, to the loss of the parties. Thus he earned for himself great respect and a very good name in the profession. In a rather sensational murder case at the time of the visit of the Prince of Wales, he appeared for the accused against Mr. Mohamed Ali Jinnah and the trial ended in the acquittal of the accused who was a very prominent member of his community. My brother-in-law earned the congratulations of Mr. Jinnah for the conduct of the case. Later he became a judge of the High Court of Bombay. He was a good friend of Gandhiji, whose regret was that my brother-in-law did not choose to throw in his lot with him (Gandhiji).

My sister-in-law did not marry but was deeply interested in social welfare work amongst our community, and was highly respected not only for her philanthropy but for her high culture as well.

My Husband's Activities

Phiroze, my husband, was the youngest of the family and was a very handsome, tall and highly cultured person. He was the proprietor of the weekly paper issued both in English and Gujarati called *The Parsi*, which he had to sell when we left for Bhopal. That paper was quite a popular one in the community and was noted for its advocacy of radical reforms such as cremation in preference to the Tower of Silence as a means of the disposal of the dead. There was considerable

Glimpses into my Personal Life

opposition to this move so much so that his office was once the target of attack. But today one finds the method commended by my husband is in greater use amongst the community and the opposition to it has fallen off considerably. It is true that any early reformer must face a certain amount of opposition for the cause he espouses. After Bhopal he set up as an investment adviser and was also engaged in the business of movie production. He was quite a success in both professions.

Differences of Opinion with My Husband

With all his great qualities his pet aversion was for sadhus in general and for the gerua (i.e., saffron-coloured) cloth in particular. We could never see eye to eye with each other on this matter. It was a special point with him to mark out the passages in the dailies reciting the crimes a sadhu was alleged to have committed. He greatly appreciated the social work I engaged in, in Bombay and elsewhere, but could never bring himself to agree to my visits either to Buddha Gaya or my association with any sadhu or to my frequent trips and long periods of residence in Ramanashram. Retrospectively, I am inclined to think my husband was not far from right in this respect too. I think that if he had had a darsan of Bhagavan, he might have changed his view. I repeatedly invited him, and especially for the opening of the Sri Patalalinga Shrine. But he could not come as he was ill with sprue — he used to fall ill frequently.

My Husband's Death

For a time after this function I was getting every day sheafs of telegrams felicitating me on the function. On 22nd May 1949, a week after this function, as I was returning from the ashram towards the evening, feeling rather depressed as if a lump had stuck in my throat, I declined dinner and went to bed. A strange feeling was in me that my husband Phiroze was peering at me through the mosquito curtain from all

sides, from my head, from my feet and from all around. This impression persisted in me till about 3 a.m. I had no taste for tea that morning either. The telegraph messenger came that morning with just one telegram instead of the usual bundle and I had the premonition that it bode me no good. It didn't either. The telegram was from my son Sohrab:—"My beloved father departed this morning." This came to me as a shock as I had no inkling until then either from my son or any other member of my family that my husband was so seriously ill. Long after my husband's passing, I learnt with regret from my elder brother that the telegram prepared by Sohrab to inform me of his critical condition was withheld by my sister, Roda, presently in occupation of my Marine Drive residence, after taking it from him promising to send it herself. It was too late and purposeless to go to Bombay either. I was quite prostrated and went to bed. Miss Merston — that great, good and staunch friend of mine, now no more — missed me at my usual place in the ashram that morning and came to find out why. She had sensed that something must be seriously wrong with me for me to be absent at the ashram. She found me in bed unable to reply to her question. Then casting about the place, she found a telegram on the table. She felt upset by the way I had been treated by my family, and she informed Bhagavan. He asked her to bring me over to the ashram. For two days I felt too deeply prostrated to be able to bring myself to go to the ashram and the third day, Miss Merston insisted on my going, after lunch, to the ashram, when Bhagavan would be alone. A few minutes after we reached the hall, Bhagavan entered. Words fail me to describe the compassionate look of Bhagavan when He looked at me. In His presence I could hardly check my copious tears. My husband had been sorry for my leaving a luxurious home, loving friends and servants. Above all he could hardly bring himself to appreciate my devotion to Bhagavan. Indeed I have often wondered whether I was right in acting as I did,

in leaving a loving hearth and home but ever found consolation in the words of Bhagavan — "everyone to himself or herself." Even when I was away from all, love and consideration did not diminish till this day.

Although moving in 'high society', my husband was a strict teetotaler and avoided both drinks and cigarettes, as did also my brother-in-law. One incident in this connection seems worth narrating.

About Dr. Wanless and Dr. Vail

Dr. Wanless and Dr. Vail of the American Mission Hospital at Miraj were our great friends. These good men did a lot of service for the poor of our country. They treated my mother when she was seriously ill and I was then just about 11 years old and a great favourite with Lady Wanless. After my marriage, I would act as a sort of a secretary to these doctors on their professional visits to Bombay when they would hold consultations at the Taj Hotel. They operated on me for cancer in 1926, in the left arm.

While in Bombay they would come and stay with me and on one occasion, Dr. Vail who knew that neither of us cared for drinks, asked us why we served drinks to our guests. He would not agree that we should serve drinks out of consideration for the habits of our guests and told us that he served at his place only wine and no other drinks and that it would be proper if we did not serve drinks at dinner at our residence.

Sohrab's Birth

Sohrab, my only son, was born in Bhopal in the year 1917. As the only son of well to do parents he was the pet of his parents and has all that life could bestow on him. Even as an infant he fell ill and we had to leave Bhopal for Poona and later for Bombay. As a boy he loved me deeply until he became a graduate and when he set up for himself in an independent career, somehow his feelings for me changed,

although outwardly he seemed just the wonderful fellow he always was. I was of course passionately fond of him, he being my only child. This turn in his nature worried me considerably. It is quite amazing how we run just after those things that kick us and turn our backs on the Lord ever ready to receive us with open arms the moment we turn to Him. I can now look back and calmly feel that all these experiences were for my good only as they deepened my spiritual quest, despite the obstacles and rebuffs on this too. The greater the sufferings the greater the experience. My passionate yearning to be freed from the weight of *samsara* was the first sign of True Spiritual Thirst. I was always thinking of what would happen to me if my mind and action went off the track. Therefore it is that I am always on my guard and carry the load of my life through this world unattached and not caring for the play of MAYA around me. My mind and thoughts are always centred on the 'ONE', while physically I am performing all kinds of actions. The key to my life lay in Bhakti. Both work and knowledge held an entirely subordinate place to this in my life and thought. Even as a child I was in search of God and met sages, when with their grace suddenly I became indifferent to what I ate, slept in the open without any fear, and continued a life of severe austerities, snakes (cobras) became my friends — as readers will know that even Bhagavan vouched for this. First Lord Buddha and later Sri Ramana helped me considerably to acquire the dispassion so necessary for progress on the spiritual line. When I was at Ramanashram I had asked Sohrab to keep in touch with me with regular weekly letters informing me in detail of the events at Bombay. But at times I would miss these letters for weeks on end. Once for nearly six weeks I had none from him. He was then holidaying at Jaipur, as arranged by me for him with my friend Sheth Govindram Seksaria. The Postmaster who was aware of my anxiety for these letters would indicate to me while sitting in the Old Hall before Bhagavan that there was none through the window.

My anxiety to hear from my son seemed to be sometimes reaching dimensions when it would no longer be bearable. Tears would flow from my eyes. Often I would pray silently to Bhagavan to remove this attachment that I felt for this son of mine. For had I not really friends around me as good as sons and daughters of my own? All over the world, the people sitting in front of Bhagavan in the hall were as good too. My prayer to be freed of this attachment and to cherish an intense love for all humanity was quite profound. With such prayer I just closed my eyes in the presence of Bhagavan until the bell rang for lunch. Then I would walk out of the hall, like a queen who had all her wishes fulfilled even before they had been expressed. This intense attachment I felt for Sohrab soon vanished and did not trouble much thereafter. I never inquired of the Postmaster for any letter for me from Sohrab from then on. The thought that Sohrab was mine vanished and I felt that the real life is within oneself and that we live but in our thoughts and emotions. The figures to which we feel attachment, love or hatred come and go and are fleeting and evanescent. Our life is really independent of them. Duty, as we understand the word, is only slavery in the garb of virtue, a morbid attachment to the flesh, an absurd greed for gain or gold or some other worldly attachment. They have a duty to fulfil who consider that the world is real. This makes them stick to this relative life, subjecting themselves to the miseries of the world. When the moods (*Vriithies*) of the mind subside, when the mind is freed of its desires, the life as we know it loses its hold over us and the world takes on its true colour and is seen to be what it is—ephemeral. Then comes true happiness, the ambrosia that drenches the parched throat like rain. We have then no 'duty' to perform or anything to do in the world. This is only a state of consciousness and is not tangible when this change comes over our consciousness. The world too changes for us and we experience the soul for what it is, the reality that transcends all mundane existence.

Such was the relief that Bhagavan granted to me. He released me from the passionate attachment to the only son of this body which had become a source of pain to me, as it is to others in similar situations. Sohrab had a very good position with Messrs. Voltas. He informed me by letter that, giving up that position he was going to Johore, his wife's place and since then, for over five years, has not sent me a line, even when informed by my sister of the heart ailment I suffered in 1966. His indifference, even as the troubles from the ashram, has been of little moment to me, thanks to the dispassion generated in me — which no wealth in the world can grant but only the grace of my Lord Ramana and of Sri Ma too.

I was about this time oppressed with the thought of the lack of money for the ordinary comforts of life. My family with a view to forcing me to return to their walk of life, had withheld from me all my personal property too. I walked one day into the ashram thinking I must tell Bhagavan of my dilemma which would oblige me to leave the ashram. I would not, however, tell Bhagavan in public, but Bhagavan looked at me this day with such benign glances, as if to say He knew my situation. A gentleman in the front row asked of Bhagavan what he should do if he wanted seriously to lead a sadhu's life but had no money. Bhagavan's reply was, "If your intentions are serious, then for the sake of a little morsel of food do not give up your good intentions. Go for *biksha*. That will be a rich and rewarding experience. First, the ego will subside. You can bring a lot more food than one can consume and can share it with others. That has been my experience too. One fine day 'R' whom I called father — offered to go for *biksha* and bring food. We shared the food and were all happy. You can do so too." Bhagavan asked that His reply may be translated for my benefit. I knew immediately that Bhagavan had in His inimitable way offered the solution for the dilemma posed in my mind. I made up my mind that it would be quite a wonderful *sadhana* that

Bhagavan had pointed out for me in reply to the question posed by another.

Sohrab comes to the Ashram

In July that year a little after the incident narrated above, I received a telegram from Sohrab that he was arriving at Tiruvannamalai the very next day. I showed it to Bhagavan and borrowing some money of a friend, went to the railway station to receive him. The next morning as I was preparing to leave for the ashram at 8 a.m., my son asked if he could also accompany me. I told him that he would have to sit on the floor like any of us as there were no chairs to sit on. He got dressed to accompany me and in the time he took, in my ardent desire that my son too should be a devotee of Bhagavan, I typed out a letter as under for Bhagavan's perusal and for returning it to me:—

My Bhagavan darling,

It is foolishness on my part to write to one who knows everything, but my Bhagavan is gracious enough to overlook our short-comings. Forgive me this letter. For myself I have nothing to ask, I have been granted the greatest boon of my life of being near the feet of my Lord and Master. But I have a prayer for Sohrab who happens to be my child. My heart will not feel happy if he remains so unfortunate as not to love Bhagavan. Bhagavan's grace will enhance his inner life. I am not concerned about his worldly prospects, as I have already laid them at Bhagavan's feet, when I first came here. Since then I have been watching how graciously Bhagavan has been looking after him in every way. But that alone will not make me happy.

O, my Bhagavan, as a beggar I am begging of you to grant me the boon of transforming him into a great devotee of yours. You performed that miracle with those to whom I spoke of Bhagavan and gave them your

picture. Up to now I have not spoken yet to Sohrab because his father's family and his father do not believe or let him believe in thee. I do not mind what they think or say of me. They have made him believe that I am sad in being here. But I do feel and care about what he continues to believe and think about me. You have answered my prayer in calling him here. I want Bhagavan to hear this prayer and change him. It is not too much for Bhagavan to perform this miracle; you have performed many greater miracles and changed the lives and destinies of many people. My true relations and friends are those who love and worship Bhagavan and none else, neither my son nor a total stranger. So, my beloved Lord, grant me this boon.

With all love and devotion,
Feroza

At the ashram, as I prostrated before Bhagavan, I handed this letter to Him which He returned to me after perusal. Sohrab was seated opposite to Bhagavan, and Bhagavan would look at Sohrab often the while we were in the hall.

'Mother... you are right'

Sohrab's birthday was on the 25th of July and on that day I gave a party to my friends at my residence; Major Chadwick, Mr. MacIver, and Sri Devaraja Mudaliar, were among those present. It was an enjoyable party. The next afternoon, on the 26th, as we were resting at home after lunch, Sohrab put me the question: "Mother, how do you manage?" "Manage what?" I asked in reply. "For upkeep", said Sohrab. "Thanks to your father and you, I have nothing and so I intend to go about with the begging bowl". He was astounded, and asked if I was off my head. He could not understand how any member of his family—more so his mother—could ever be a beggar. The Taleiyarkhans are a great

people and he was quite upset. He asked if I would accompany him to Madras to see him off. With Bhagavan's permission, I went to Madras with him. I was hoping that he would tell me of his reactions to the ashram and his impressions of Bhagavan. The train was about to leave and he had not spoken a word so far, but taking hold of me, he kissed me, and said, "Mother, I am very happy. You are right"! and jumped into the train as it whistled off. So tense was I to find his reaction that these words shook me like a storm and left me in a flood of tears which my sari could not hide from the people about or from the attendant of the waiting room at the station as I waited to catch the train for Tiruvannamalai, where my gracious Lord was so overwhelmingly kind to me that I knew He had discerned my heart's sorrow.

Four days later a telegram from my sister in Bombay asked me for instructions for the disposal of my jewels and other valuables handed over to her by my son and I asked for them to be sent to me through a friend to Madras. With Bhagavan's permission, I went again to Madras, took charge of the valuables, sold a part of my jewellery for a few thousands and came back with the rest, to the ashram. Thus did it please Bhagavan to put an end to my alarms on the material plane as well.

Sohrab had a love affair or two. I was keen he should wed a particular girl and he was also keen, but somehow it turned out that she had to leave for England, and Europe. This marriage plan fizzled out. Subsequently he married Fatima, Princess of Johore. Sohrab paid two further visits to the ashram before Mahasamadhi and one visit much later, while Fatima with two of her children came once after the Mahasamadhi.

Visit to St. Alphonso

As I had not been blessed with a daughter of my own, I felt comforted that it was given to me to be a foster-mother to my youngest sister, Rita, whom I looked after even from her very infancy. Amongst my sisters, I may say I am very fond of

Rita for this reason, although I love equally all my brothers and sisters too. Rita is devoted to St. Theresa of Liseux and became a convert to the Roman Catholic religion. Her husband Mr. D'Mello, now no more, was a great cricketer. In February 1950 I was asked to meet them at the air port at Madras where I went with the permission of Bhagavan and met not only Rita and her husband, but also my sister Mehra. We went to the Hotel Connemara on Mount Road when Mr. D'Mello told me I could take my sisters with me to my friends the Tarapores, as he would be away in Ceylon with a cricket team for over a week. I had permission to be away from the ashram for just that day and so he proposed that I take my sisters with me to Tiruvannamalai in the car provided for us by his friend the Rajah of Chettinad and we reached home about 7-30 p.m. After dinner my sister Rita asked to be taken for the darshan of "my Bhagavan" and when I told her it was against the conventions observed in the ashram for ladies to enter the ashram, she teased me for lack of courage and set out for the ashram, accompanied by us. As we approached the steps leading to the New Hall, Bhagavan, then in the Nirvana room came out, to go to the bathroom next door and the attendant then on duty Anjaneyalu met us on the steps, made kind enquiries of us and although the hour was late, took us to the Nirvana room for the darshan of Bhagavan, saying that all the ashram was fast asleep and an exception could be made in our favour. My sister Rita made a deep, low bow to Bhagavan while Mehra made the usual prostration and Bhagavan made very kind enquiries of us all. We came back home and as arranged earlier, left for Kerala a day or two later to pay our respects to Sister Alphonso, who was said to be performing some great miracles there. I had arranged with Sri Dorairaj, the District Collector at Vellore, for our tickets to Kerala and on reaching Vellore by car, we found our car blocked by the large crowd assembled for the darshan of the statue of Our Lady Fatima then taken along in procession. So we too stayed on the roadside for the

darshan and when the statue came up in a car, I found myself very close to it and the Father in charge there asked me to come upto the car for the darshan of the Lady Fatima. I sought the Father's permission for my sister Mehra, an asthmatic, touching the statue from the ground itself. We then resumed our journey and reached the residence of the District Collector rather late. When he learnt the cause of the delay he regretted his having missed the opportunity of darshan of Lady Fatima. We then left for Kerala where arrangements had been made for us by Mr. Tarapore and after darshan of Sister Alphonso returned to Tiruvannamalai.

Sister Rita and Her Husband visit the Ramanashram

My brother-in-law, Mr. D'Mello had returned earlier than he had anticipated from Ceylon and came to Tiruvannamalai. Both husband and wife were anxious to have darshan of Bhagavan. Entering the Nirvana room the couple made a low bow to Bhagavan and Rita took off her finger the diamond-studded engagement ring given to her by her husband and also the jewel-studded bracelet on her wrist containing the medallia of Jesus Christ and several other saints and laid them both on Bhagavan's lap. Bhagavan examined them all carefully, was greatly interested by the medallia and praised all the saints there, and wore on His finger the ring for a little time and returned them both to Rita. Husband and wife then prostrated to Bhagavan seeking His blessings. Emotionally overcome in Bhagavan's presence, my brother-in-law knelt down at Bhagavan's feet and requested "Bhagavan, won't you cure yourself? The world needs you. I am sure you can easily cure yourself to bless the world." My fears for the behaviour of this ardent Catholic couple in Bhagavan's presence were quite groundless. Such is the overpowering grace of Bhagavan.

My Mother gets a direct experience

Perhaps it was in my stars that almost from my birth I should

be denied a mother's love. The course of life I adopted—my frequent visits to Buddha Gaya, resort to saints of the Hindu faith and lastly my residence in Sri Ramanashram, all combined to stress the difference between us, my mother being a staunch Zoroastrian who could see no good in the path I had adopted. No wonder then that she took a leading part in maligning me amongst the people I had moved in, in Bombay. However, all that changed by the grace of Bhagavan. In 1957 my sister, with whom my mother was in Bombay, wrote to me to do my part by my mother and insisted on my doing so although I pointed out the differences that held us apart. I felt I could do little for my mother. I did not feel happy with my mother for the first few years mother was with me and I had quite often to pray to Bhagavan to ease the situation for me. Bhagavan helped me in the most miraculous manner. Two or three years after mother's arrival in Tiruvannamalai, in the early hours of the morning before dawn, Bhagavan appeared in the *flesh* and told her not to go on finding fault with Feroza, her daughter as He (Bhagavan) was with both mother and me. Mother was quite changed after this experience of hers and would often pray to Bhagavan with uplifted hands. She passed away in February 1967 and before that event, was quite reconciled to me to bless me several times over. Since her demise, I have often had the feeling that mother is with me in her astral body, looking after me and protecting me.

I must not fail to express the deep debt of love and gratitude I owe to two very dear souls—Sri Saidas and Herr Hugo Maier who are both the residents of the Ashram. Strange it may seem but the first day Herr Hugo Maier—who is a wonderful healer and homeopathy doctor—arrived in India, he immediately started treating my mother and me—especially when I had the severe heart attack. It was really Bhagavan's grace that made available to me the invaluable service of these two dears at my hours of need. Of course from the first day of his arrival, I loved him as my son because of his love, and such consideration to both

of us for several years. When my mother passed away, her last word of gratitude to him was "My Lord" not thinking of any one of us. When we took her body to Madras for burial he accompanied us to Madras for her last rites. My gratitude and love can never pay him back.

To my Bhagavan I render my humble, and grateful thanks for the very kindly succour, He has rendered to me through some form or other, through some person or other, at all times of my need as if He knew what, when, where and how I would be in need of help. Glory be to my Bhagavan!

II

SPIRITUAL STEPS

St. Theresa of Liseux, my first *guru*—Meeting with Dr. Seghal—
Meditation and vision of Shri Krishna—Father Theysken.

St. Theresa of Liseux, my first Guru

Seven were the operations for one thing or another my body has been subjected to. In 1926 I was operated for cancer of the left arm which itself followed an earlier one for appendicitis. Coming to know that I was to undergo this operation for cancer at Miraj, and aware of the miraculous powers that St. Theresa of Liseux, France, possessed to cure even hopeless cases, my friend, Mrs. Maries Patuck, a French lady settled down in India and then on a visit to her country, undertook a pilgrimage on my behalf to the chapel of that saint and sent me a book of the life of that saint as also medallias and some literature about her. I believe—thanks to the blessings of this saint—that I was able to survive the operation. Even as I read the life of this saint, the feeling arose in me that I too must lead a life like that saint. I began saying prayers to her for guidance and protection and to turn my mind Godward. Somehow a sense of peace and calm pervaded my being and I felt that St. Theresa had responded to my prayers. She became almost my first *guru* on the spiritual path.

Meeting with Dr. Seghal

I spent a period after this operation in Bangalore and returned to Bombay where although my health had improved, the effects of the operation were quite visible. Sometime later the

Spiritual Steps

Maharani of Gwalior, in order to give me a change of climate invited me and my sister Rita to Mhow. It was destiny that took me to Mhow. A friend of my sister Rita, to whom we paid a visit immediately after reaching Mhow, called on us a few days later and introduced to us a friend who had accompanied him on that visit—Dr. Seghal, who, he said, besides being a doctor of medicine was also an astrologer, palmist and a phrenologist. My sister began to ask him questions concerning her future, but far from replying to her, Dr. Seghal was looking at me from time to time making me feel uncomfortable with the attention he paid to me, overlooking the questions my sister was putting to him. At length, he asked me my *Lagna*, and when told, said he was expecting some such reply, and asked me if I would meet him in private. I took him inside one room, where he examined my palms and told me in words that recalled to me what the saint Baba Jan, a few years earlier had told me in Poona, that there would be a complete change in my life. Thus it was Dr. Seghal who took the initiative and pushed me on to the spiritual path. I have kept steadily on that path without hesitation or any question of turning back.

Meditation and vision of Shri Krishna

He asked me if I spent any time in some meditation. I was completely alien even to that word. He asked me to entertain him to lunch the next day and coming home early initiated me and taught me how to sit in meditation and asked me to pursue it steadily, rising at 4 a.m. to sit at it. That was the first time I had to rise from bed so early. I followed his instructions faithfully, getting up early and sitting for meditation in the posture he asked me to. After 8 days I asked him what would happen to me and what I would experience. He told me not to worry saying that the Lord would guide me on the right lines for the future which I could look forward to with confidence. So it happened on the twenty-first day. I had a vision of Shri Krishna, a name I hadn't even heard

of, innocent as I was of any knowledge of the Gita, the Mahabharata and the Bhagavata stories of Shri Krishna. I remember this quite clearly that the Lord showed me a spot, well-lit, near the shadows of some big trees and told me that that was my place obviously for continuing my meditations. I feared that my vision might after all have been just a vivid imagination of mine and so told Dr. Seghal when I met him. He told me not to ask any questions but simply to continue with my meditation even as he had taught me. He said that things would happen of their own accord, without any conscious effort on my part. After about a month in Mhow, we returned to Bombay and it happened that sometime in 1928, I left for Calcutta on a sudden whim and stayed there with an old spiritualist friend of mine, Muni Bai, whom I had known in Bombay as a leading actress who had played roles as Padmini and the like. One day I found this lady standing next to my bed in an attitude of prayer and may be her prayers also helped to draw me on the spiritual path.

Father Theysken

I met here at Calcutta a grand old Jesuit Father named Theysken. He would come to me daily, tell me about the great Lord Jesus. He hoped to convert me to Catholicism. About a month or two after reaching Calcutta, H. H. The Maharani of Tikari, took me rather unexpectedly to Buddha Gaya, where started my real *sadhana* on the spiritual path. On our way to Buddha Gaya, the Maharani told me the story of the life of the Lord Buddha. I heard this story for the first time from her and it thrilled me. Taking some flowers from her lovely garden at Gaya, and accompanied by her brother, we went to Buddha Gaya. The Maharani did not get out of the car, but sent me into the temple of Lord Buddha in the company of her brother. What an experience it was!

III

BUDDHA GAYA

On entering the Temple—The Statue of Lord Buddha—I got the sign—The Mahant permits—Swami Shyamananda—Some Experiences—The vow of Silence for 91 days—The sight of a snake—Cleaning the floor—Pujari's request—Mazar Renovation—Chadwick and Merston visit Buddha Gaya.

On entering the Temple

How can I, who has not been blessed with the gift of poetry, describe the infinite grace of that merciful, ageless Lord Buddha? The picture that I sketch now for the reader is only skin and bone and lack the flesh and blood which alone can convey the exquisite beauty, the glory of that experience. An experience if truly shared can only lead one to realize the passing evanescence of the fleeting pleasures we run after, with so much effort in this mundane world under the false name 'high life'. How forgetful we are that that is high life which is lasting and which blesses one with unending happiness, which no earthly tribulation can ever even attempt to mar? What a wonderful life is that which we miss amidst our daily routine and toil—a life misspent in pettiness and jealousy, criticising and dissecting friends and foes alike; feeling no pity for fellow human beings, creating unhappiness for oneself and for others too, all the while blaming the innocent Lord for our crimes—yes—crimes if only we knew what it is that we do every day in our lives! If one's heart be touched with an infinitesimal part of the cosmic love that one ought to feel, can there ever be an enemy to another, or can one feel inimical towards the least of us, whatever form we may wear, as human beings, animals or insects? Would we not trample all that pride and glory of our possessions under our feet

to be just and humble servants of the Lord to do His behest and thank the Lord for it? But let me not grow lyrical. This is the one thing that each of us must experience for oneself. One hardly can impart this to another in words or otherwise, however great our love may be for that other.

The Statue of Lord Buddha

This visit to Buddha Gaya marks a turning point in a life otherwise ill-spent in pursuit of the vanities. I was a rich, beautiful society lady much sought after in the days of the British Raj, visiting, dining out, dancing, gossiping, playing at politics, trying out saris and jewellery for friends and bothered with the innumerable other pettinesses with which we found it possible to waste our time, keeping ourselves busy all the while. It created in me a longing for that infinite peace and calm that the statue of Lord Buddha in the temple at Buddha Gaya created and infused in me, peace that passeth understanding and to decipher which has been the attempt of poets whom the world admires, even if it does not choose to understand.

I got the sign

Entering the temple of Lord Buddha in the company of the brother of my kind host, with the beautiful roses picked from the garden of the Maharani of Gaya, I stood before the Lord, spell-bound and immersed in the strange peace that emanated from the figure which did not seem to me to be either cold or lifeless, but full of life - an everlasting life. The beatific smile on the lips of Lord Buddha bewitched me and made me long and pray to seek that Lord's help and guidance on the path to inner peace. Observing a rose on the crown of the statue, I prayed that, as a sign that I was fit for the grace of the Lord, the rose may be given to me. No sooner was this prayer mentally uttered, than the rose fell and at my request the *pajani* there handed it to me. I felt as if my physical being was merged in a flood of pure light of infinite

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gentleness and great force, and every call of my body tingled with the sensation one might feel on coming up to enjoy the pure air on a mountain peak in the early hours of the dawn, immediately on release from a deep, dark dungeon. Forcing myself to leave the vicinity of the statue, I went round the temple to see the far-famed Bodhi tree, and lo! was led further on to the exact spot Lord Krishna had shown me in my meditations earlier, besides the shadows of great trees—the spot where I then thought the Lord had intended my meditations to be continued. This discovery did cause in me some change noticeable as to make my friend the Maharani of Tikari, Sita Devi, ask me if I was ill and what the matter was with me that had caused me to turn pale—me, whose skin matched in colour that of any very beautiful lady from the temperate regions of Scandinavia. I could only haltingly assure my friend that I was quite well. We then left for her palace. That night the Maharani left for England, leaving me in the company of her trustworthy house-keeper, a Christian lady named Mrs. Dola.

The Mahant Permits

Resolving that night to obey the commands of Shri Krishna conveyed in my earlier meditations, I sought out the Mahant of Buddha Gaya for permission to stay in the proximity of the temple to carry on my *sadhana*. The Mahant, an 88 year old patriarch of a man, although kindly disposed when he heard of the object of request, was at first rather firm in his refusal—the place was infested by cannibalistic *Bhutani*s who only the other day had cut up and eaten a woman. But I would not take a refusal. So firm and so insistent was I in my request that the Mahant was forced to relent, on condition that I gave him in writing a letter that I was there on my own and none of them would in any way be responsible for me if anything befell me. So great was my faith in the Lord and in my destiny that I hardly hesitated to execute the guarantee in the form in which it was asked. Greatly relieved to have

at last obtained the requisite permission, I left for Calcutta to get a few things for leading the solitary life at Buddha Gaya as also to bid goodbye to my friends, Muni Bai and Father Theysken, the latter of whom tried hard to dissuade me. Bidding goodbye to these well-meaning and beloved friends, I reached Gaya with my few belongings as befits a *sadhu*. The next day I left with Mrs. Dola for the temple at Buddha Gaya; that kindly matron asked if I would not like her to keep me company in that lonely place. I just thanked her for her kindness but didn't wish her to stay with me. So she left me alone there in the evening just about sunset. How heavy solitude sat upon me then! I cried my heart out and prayed to the gentle Lord to help, guide and protect one who had sought refuge in Him in all humility. Relieved from and by that flood of tears, I rose and made arrangements for my living quarters in the small room given to me and went to bed. Rising early the next morning, the problem of bathing faced me as I made a temporary bathroom curtained off in the open ground with my sari tied to trees. Taking a few jasmine flowers after my ablutions, I went to the temple of Lord Buddha, when uncontrollable tears shook my frame, and I prayed to Him for mercy and guidance. That same indescribably charming smile lit up the face of the Lord as it had done on my first visit, as though to encourage me in that almost desolate spot to take heart and continue my efforts and not to give up in fear—for, have I not come to the altar of God, resigned to suffer all privations and determined not to worry about any sacrifice I might be called upon to make, and but the single purpose of ever keeping the Lord in my mind's eye in all I may do, think or feel? The light that all of us seek was not denied to me found in me the courage to spend not one night but several nights at that place, all alone.

Swami Shyamananda

The Lord's mercy was such that very early during my stay I

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left in the company of an aged sadhu, Swami Shyamananda Sarasvathi, who had retired from the post of Chief Engineer in the Railway service. He heard my story and he, who earlier had doubted the wisdom of the Mahant in permitting me to stay at the place, encouraged me greatly on my path and relieved the tedium of the solitude that otherwise might have weighed with me heavily. I learnt that this Swamiji after retirement trained himself in *pranayama* and other *Hatha yoga* practices and had spent long years of austerities. He taught me some of these practices and guided me even as a kind father along the path of *sadhana* and was of very great help to me. Long before I even heard of Bhagavan and His now famous 'Who am I?' this Swamiji told me of the *Vichara Marga* and gave me some idea of the Hindu philosophy also. He had some powers of clairvoyance as I found later on in the second year of my stay in Buddha Gaya when he told me that our meeting at Buddha Gaya was not a fortuitous one but that he had met me in earlier lives as my son, and that destiny had brought us together at Buddha Gaya for him to guide me in my *sadhana*. So much was his trust in his word that he would refer to my son Sohrab—he had not met him—as his brother and not in any other terms. He kept me company and helped me right through the years 1928-1938. When I left for Bombay in 1938 after my penance at Buddha Gaya, he sent me a card to say that he was dropping his body but that I need not regret the parting as he would be with me at all times and be my protector. One card he wrote about this time reads:

Dear Mother,

I am sorry to let you know that I am not feeling well for over a month, suffering from diabetes and thirst. I have stopped eating rice and other cereals. I believe I am on the way to the Infinite, which I hope will be blissful to me. Don't write to me. My love to my dear

Sohrab. I am thinking of going to Calcutta within 8 days.

Ever yours,
Shyamananda Sarasvathi.

Some experiences

When in 1939 I was in England and had occasion to attend a seance by Mr. Foster, a renowned spiritualist, he said that he (Mr. Foster) saw the hand of some great saint on me and that I was under his constant protection. Thereafter I felt no doubt that dear Swamiji has been with me guiding and protecting me through life. On receipt of this card I wrote a letter to Sri Narahari, the young boy whom the Mahant of Buddha Gaya had adopted as his successor and of whom I was quite as fond as if he were a son to me too, to find out what had happened to this aged Swamiji and he confirmed that the Swamiji had entered the waters of the Ganga at Calcutta and had departed from this world.

I would spend yearly a period of about three or four months as suited my convenience at Buddha Gaya. There was no fixed period of the year for me to go there. The last visit to Buddha Gaya was in 1940 after which I have not been there, certainly not for *sadhana*. During each of these periods of my visit to Buddha Gaya, I had different experiences, some of which may interest the reader.

The vow of Silence for 91 days

It was in the second year of my stay, I believe, that as I was sitting under the Bodhi tree for meditation with eyes closed, feeling and enjoying a wonderful peace, I heard some one telling me to observe a period of silence for ninetyone days. I did so from the day after, adding to it a further penance of restricted diet of one meal only of just a cup of vegetable *kichadi* about noon, for the entire period. One night, may be about 1 or 2 a.m., I heard a most musical voice calling my name—Feroza—Feroza—Feroza—and woke me up with

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the feeling of a current of electricity passing through my body. The morning after I could see the beatific smile light up the face of the Lord as if to tell me that it was He who was calling to me that night. When I sat down for meditation, I could feel some sensation as if the *kundalini sakti* was stirring up; I could not sit for meditation nor understand what it was and made as if to return to my room.

The sight of a snake

Then I saw a large snake coiled round the neck of the Lord Buddha with its hood spread out. I was then in such a state of bliss that I was not afraid to approach the statue and light up incense at the altar. The snake made no move and was quite still. That night about 3-30 a.m. when I woke up, I saw the snake sitting on my chappal near my bed and when I got off the bed, it just slipped away. The incredulous Italian Buddhist monk whom I met on this occasion of the second visit to Buddha Gaya, wanting proof of my experience, without informing me, appeared to have spent three or four nights sitting on a chair near my bed to watch this phenomenon. One night I noticed him sitting near my head some distance away from my bed. He told me that he had been watching to find out the truth of my story of the snake and confirmed that he had seen the snake coil itself on my chappals all these nights without harming anyone and apologised to me for his incredulity. He told me that the Lord was looking after me and watching me. This became the talk of the town. Besides this experience, I have many times heard my name called out from the temple at dead of night and experiences of other kinds too came my way. I was able to gauge the thoughts of other people; whatever I wished to happen or whomsoever I wanted to meet would turn up spontaneously without my going after it.

Cleaning the floor

In the third year of my stay at Buddha Gaya I noticed the dirt

that had accumulated on the floor of the temple; devotees used to burn ghee lamps to the Lord but would not care to clean up the place afterwards. This practice had gone on for ages, and so much dirt had gathered on the floor that the stone flooring had become quite invisible. So great was the dirt that the stench emanating from it was a little hard to endure. I decided that it was high time to clean it up and made up my mind to do it myself. Securing permission for the task from the Mahant was a problem, but I had my way and set about the task with determination and finally my efforts were crowned with the sight of the stone flagged flooring of the temple for the first time in many years.

Pujari's request

I do not now recall when, whether in that year or in the next, the aged pujari of that temple came running to me while I was sitting for meditation one morning to tell me of a dream of his. The Lord Buddha was smiling and looking at him with love, told him that he was pleased with his doing up the floors of the temple so well and asking the pujari to meet the Lord at Banaras. The pujari requested me to help him to go to Banaras and I arranged with the Mahant for the pujari to go and stay at their Math in Banaras and provided him with funds for the journey. He informed me that he had a peaceful and happy time at Banaras and was preparing to return, when the Lord took him into his fold and he passed away peacefully. The aged Swamiji was happy to hear the news and blessed me for the help I rendered to the old pujari.

Mazar renovation

I cannot recall in which year it was that the next experience came my way. There, near the tree under whose shade I would sit for meditation sometimes, was the ancient grave of a Muslim saint—Mazar—of which I knew little. An aged maulvi who would pass me on his way from his house to the nearby masjid told me that this was the samadhi of a great

Muslim saint and I went to see it in his company. It was in bad repair as there was none to take any interest in it. Something in me urged me to put the place in good repair and I sought the help of dear Narahari for that purpose. Getting the necessary men and materials I saw that the renovation was done tastefully and had the Fatiya performed. Some days after the ceremony, in the small hours of the morning, may be about 2 or 2-30 a.m., I saw in a dream this place lit up with a soft heavenly light and six old beautiful men clad in white standing on the parapet of the grave, their hands uplifted in prayer. The maulvi, whom I told of the dream, informed me that he had seen the same phenomenon, not once but several times and not in a dream but actually when about 3 a.m. he would pass by the grave on the way from his house to the nearby masjid for the namaz. He told me that it was a sign of the pleasure that the saint felt at the renovation of the grave where his body had been interred.

Chadwick and Merston visit Buddha Gaya

At my instance and after Bhagavan's *Mahasamadhi*, Miss Merston and Major Chadwick visited Buddha Gaya where they were well received and entertained by the Mahant who told them of my experiences at Buddha Gaya which they heard from him for the first time and wrote to me thus:

Dear Mother,

MAHANTJI is over-kind and hospitable. I wish you were with us. Your name works wonders over here. All here have overpowering love for you. We both are proud of you. Much love from both of us.

Elizabeth

The Mahant took them both on an elephant ride which they enjoyed greatly.

These memories of Buddha Gaya stand out prominently

in my mind long after I ceased visiting that place. The spots associated with these men of God, tall by every standard except our worldly one, are holy and ought to be held in great reverence by one and all for the blessings they can confer on us weak and miserable human beings. If we but took care to live in God's ways, how happy we could all be. Can't we teach every man and woman and child to pray for more love and yet more love being sent down to sweeter life in this world for all?

He who is everywhere without attachment, on meeting with anything good or bad, who neither rejoices nor hates, His wisdom is fixed.

IV

HOME OF DEVOTION

Sorrows of the Fair Sex—Swami Yogendra and the Idea of a Home of Devotion—My first visit to Ramanashram—Mr. Bose—Government's denial to rent us the site—My Inner promptings and Surrender.

Sorrows of the Fair Sex

Popular in high society for a variety of reasons such as an attractive personality, great theatrical talents, a fair knowledge about jewellery and of the varied articles that are ever an attraction to ladies of high society, I had several intimate friends amongst the leaders of society in Bombay and elsewhere in India. Amongst them were Maharajahs and Maharanis, leaders in business and in Government and men and women in all strata of society. I knew somewhat intimately something of the joys and sorrows of my sex in whatever walk of life they may have been placed, the sorrows being deeper the higher the strata they belonged to.

Swami Yogendra and the idea of a Home of Devotion

Swami Yogendra who then, as even now, is managing along with his capable wife Sita Devi an Yoga Institute at Santa Cruz, Bombay, is a good friend of mine. On return from one of the trips to Buddha Gaya for *sadhana*, this question of the unhappy and miserable womenfolk came to be discussed between us and together we thrashed out a scheme for the organization of a "Home of Devotion," where such women could live and lead a happy life in communion with God. We discussed the details of the scheme, drew up a prospectus for it, and had promises, as good as cash on hand, to the tune of Rs. 5,00,000

for this purpose. We had also fixed upon a few bungalows belonging to the Government on the "Khandivli Hills" which had electricity, telephone and other conveniences, but was then vacant, and had entered into a preliminary agreement with the Government to rent out this place for our "Home of Devotion" at a concessional rent. We were pushing on with great enthusiasm with our scheme. But we did not enter into a pucca agreement with the Government for leasing out the property to us, so great was our trust in the word of the Government. But how mistaken we were! Sri Satyananda Giri of the Yogoda Sat Sanga who heard of this scheme from me urged me to obtain the blessings of a great soul for the scheme before I actually launched it. He urged me to seek the blessings of the sage of Tiruvannamalai. I told him of the initial rebuff I had received from the ashram when I wrote asking whether it would be convenient for me to go over. But the Swamiji persisted and I decided to take the scheme with me to Tiruvannamalai for the Sage's blessings.

My first visit to Ramanashram

I knew that my people would hardly approve of these 'wild cat' schemes of mine or of my visiting sadhus, and so I managed to slip out of Bombay on the pretext of a visit to Madras and reached Tiruvannamalai on November 9, 1937—a memorable day in my life. The witty station master called for a bullock cart, put me in it saying that that was 'the taxi' that was available. For a mere three annas it dropped me at the ashram, where then there was only the Old Hall, the dining hall and a cowshed and a few other huts and no rooms for guests such as you find today. At the ashram office, received kindly by the *sarvadhikari*, I was taken to a small cage-like room without any of the conveniences I had been accustomed to. I was anxious to see the Maharshi first and asked to be taken to the bathroom. There came my first shock to be told that there was none and hence I made a

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makeshift one out of my saris and had my bath, dressed and left for the Old Hall where the benign Maharshi, seated on a couch, beckoned me to sit down. The lovely star-like, calm eyes attracted me highly and looked at me with deep compassion. A little later, I spoke to Bhagavan of the object of my visit and handed to Rajagopal the copy of the prospectus of the Home of Devotion I had brought with me for Bhagavan to read. He read it, re-read it and read it out to the people present in the Old Hall and then pointed me out as its sponsor, in a way that made me feel highly elated to think that even on the first day I had been able to get the blessings of the Maharshi I had been specially asked to seek. The lunch gong rang at 11 a.m. and the few of us then present trooped into the dining hall after Bhagavan, where I was seated opposite to Bhagavan. Bhagavan was all solicitude for me. He paid great attention to what I had for food as He did in respect of all the others too. Bhagavan's love for me as I sat for lunch with Him touched me. Thus on this first occasion itself I felt that God can be Love and only LOVE and nothing but Love. After the midday rest, I came back to the hall at 2-30 p.m. and was sent for by the *sarvadhikari* at 4 p.m. to be told that as ladies could not stay in the ashram at night, I must pack and go to the town after dinner to rest for the night.

Mr. Bose

Shocked already at not finding proper facilities for guests at the ashram, I shuddered to think what it would be like in the town. I was protesting to the *sarvadhikari*, when into the office walked Mr. Bose whom I had forgotten but who remembered me well and was surprised to see me there. To his question how long I was planning to stay in the ashram I told him in a huff that I was planning to leave that very minute for lack of accommodation. Mr. Bose knew my connections and influence and told the *sarvadhikari* that I must be provided for and offered to accommodate me in his building which then

consisted of only one room and a bathroom and a verandah. He let me occupy the room while he made himself as comfortable as he could on the verandah and my luggage was brought to Mr. Bose's place from the ashram. When I returned to the ashram, Bhagavan made kind enquiries of Mr. Bose about my accommodation at night. After dinner, Mr. Bose told me of his experiences with Bhagavan, before retiring to bed late that night. Spending three days at the ashram on this my first visit, I returned to Bombay with a feeling of elation that my pet scheme of a Home of Devotion would succeed, as I was passionately intent on making it succeed. I gave the green signal to Sri Yogendra and Smt. Sita Devi to go ahead with the scheme. I said I would meet them every day to chalk out our programme.

Government's denial to rent us the site

One morning a cover marked 'confidential' was delivered to me from the Government and shock awaited me when I opened it. It told me that the Government could not allot to us on lease the building for which we had entered into a temporary agreement with them. Another party had greater influence and had got it from the Government. I rushed to Sri Yogendra, told him and went with him to the Secretariat to meet the Chief Minister at whom I lashed in all my fury at the way they had treated me, just because we postponed entering into a formal and legal agreement with them for the tenancy of the building at Khandivli Hill we were keen on having for housing the Home of Devotion. Sri Yogendra was also arguing vehemently with the Minister when suddenly I almost went faint and could not speak. A voice within me told me, 'Give this up, it is not for you'. I could not fight at all much as I had determined to put up a stiff fight with the Minister over this lease. Sri Yogendra felt afraid for me and together we gave up our discussion with the Minister and getting into my car, I do not know how I reached my home to fall on the bed in deep grief. Both Sri Yogendra and I were

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greatly disappointed that the saint's blessings had been futile and were justly wroth at the sage for blessing the scheme that ran aground even before it could be launched. I wanted then and there to fly to Tiruvannamalai and take the Maharshi to task for misleading me in the project. I asked Sri Yogendra to carry on with the project without me but he declined to. Sri Swami Satyananda who had first asked me to proceed to Tiruvannamalai to get the Maharshi's blessings urged me now to proceed with my *sadhana* and after a short while, I cooled down. I followed his advice and left for Buddha Gaya and afterwards for Australia in company with Bas earlier stated. After my return from this voyage, I had the opportunity to go to Tiruvannamalai in 1939 to take the Maharshi to task for having misled me, only to realize that the Maharshi in His infinite grace had taught me potently and in time where my task lay.

My inner promptings and surrender

I surrendered absolutely on that occasion to the Maharshi and since then have not had to look back at the decision then made, except at times with the vexation caused by the ashram which too, Bhagavan knew how to erase from my mind with His gentle, compassionate look. This He did even after His *Mahasamadhi* and although these vexations continued perhaps in a larger measure, my faith in Bhagavan and my experience of His grace could never let me depart or be sent away from the place.

V

I DECIDE

Visit to Ashram—Bhagavan—Shri Naina—Vision I saw on the Arunachala—Bhagavan permits my stay—Bhagavan approves—Foundation on Good Friday.

Visit to Ashram

The decision to stay at Tiruvannamalai and certainly, the decision to make it and not Bombay my home was not an easy or a quick one. During my second visit to the ashram, I stayed for about three or four months and took up residence in the house of my friend Mr. Bose. Years earlier I had met him at Sri K. F. Nariman's in Bombay and Mr. Bose had sought my help in some of his ventures. During his frequent visits to Bombay on these affairs, he used to be my guest.

Bhagavan

I would go to the old Hall to sit in Bhagavan's presence to enjoy the deep, ineffable peace radiating from Him; I noticed that His powerful, bright and shining body sometimes seemed to tremble a bit and then become immobile and motionless as if He was in deep *samadhi*. When He emerged from it, the same trembling motion would be noticed. I felt that the greatest power on earth was not with its kings and statesmen, but with this man here whose only earthly possessions were the bamboo staff and *kamandalu* lying beside Him on the floor and His loin cloth. This man had plunged into His inmost depths to find and be the truth that we are, which men of giant intellect may try to explain in learned ways. His love and humility were truly heroic. Utterly unassuming, He never

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tolerated any fuss being made about Him. Gentle, yet firm, His calm could never be disturbed. Pure in heart and mind, having realized the self of all, there was no *guru* or *sisya* for Him. He had an equal regard for one and all.

Sitting in the presence of such a Man, thoughts of the fugitiveness and the vanity of life as I had known, lived and suffered would pass across my mind. I felt that one and one thing alone was worth thirsting after in life, that was to know who the 'I' we always refer to in all our thoughts, words and actions is. For my deep conviction was that it was absolutely essential to obtain the grace of the *guru*. Wealth, relations, status did not count in the least. I remembered that the Lord Buddha disowned his son, wife and relations as also his kingdom and Sri Ramakrishna claimed no relations as his. When Bhagavan's mother came to Him up on the Hill and claimed to be His mother, Bhagavan pointed out all the ladies sitting before Him and said they were all his mothers too.

Shri Naina

My appetite to know more of Bhagavan was considerably whetted by Shri Naina whom I met on my first visit and with whom I established a great bond to last our life almost the moment I saw him. He and Viswanathaswamy would spend the evenings with me at Mr. Bose's place and regale me with stories of their experiences and of the life of Bhagavan, which held me spellbound.

Vision I saw on the Arunachala

One such evening I saw on the hill Arunachala opposite to me, a vision of a blood-coloured heart in the spinning brilliant Jupiter against the background of the hill, which made me think of my birth star Jupiter. This vision escaped Naina and when I called his attention to it he tried to brush it off saying it must be some fires lit by wood-cutters on the hill. I could hardly believe that such brilliance, which was quite stationary and immobile, could proceed from any man-made fires. I

watched fascinated by this vision from about 8 p.m. till 3 a.m. that night. Tired, I slept away and then I had a dream. The sky before me opened, a flower-decked swing appeared out of it with the Lord Siva seated on it, the tiger skin around the waist and the hooded cobra round the neck. Swinging thrice, the Lord placed His feet on my forehead and on the third movement, when I asked who He was, He said He was Lord Siva. The dream passed—that morning when I was in the old Hall, I had the sensation that Bhagavan was looking at me curiously, obliquely from out of the corner of His eye, as if to say He was aware of my experience the previous night.

Thoughts of the days spent at Buddha Gaya and my experiences there would however often cross my mind. I had always a strong feeling that I must be grateful and faithful to all who had helped me even in the least, and more so if one desired to progress on the spiritual path. I suffered many mental misgivings: if after the experience of grace showered on me by the Lord Buddha, was I right to go over to Shri Ramana? Such thoughts were to assail me years later with Shri Ma Ananda Mayi too. There were times when the excellent food my cook had prepared seemed tasteless and insipid and would be rejected.

It was not long that this perplexity assailed me. It pleased Lord Buddha and Shri Ramana to tell me in no uncertain terms that there is not an iota of difference between them and that they were one.

May be about 1 a.m. or 2, while asleep in my room in Mr. Bose's house, I dreamt I was quite alone with Bhagavan in the old Hall with my eyes closed in meditation. Bhagavan was leaning on His couch against the side pillow from which appeared a brilliant star throwing a soft heavenly light on me. The light disappeared and I saw Lord Buddha dressed like a king with all the kingly regalia and jewellery with the tiara on His head seated where Bhagavan was. In a few seconds the figure disappeared and the figure of Shri Ramana emerged. What great assurance need I seek to make up my

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mind that I should make a second home here in Tiruvannamalai and spend a few winter months every year here?

I told Naina of this dream. I did not tell him of the earlier one as he seemed not inclined to believe the vision of the heart-shaped light I saw on the hill. As usual with him, Naina repeated this dream to Bhagavan when he met Him alone in *Plakothu* that day. Bhagavan seemed to have remarked "Oh, Oh, let her get along," as if in approval.

Mr. Bose had already offered to let me reside in one of the homes in his compound whenever I chose to come to Tiruvannamalai. He had framed a set of 32 rules for the guidance of the residents of his compound, one of which at any rate, I broke quite regularly every day, when Naina and Viswanathaswamy would spend long hours in the evening till 9 p.m. or even later, talking about Bhagavan and other spiritual matters. I looked to Naina as a father for guidance in a strange land, where I was alien to the language, manners and customs. Told of this breach, Mr. Bose naturally tried to remonstrate gently with me which made me resolve to find myself another residence even if it were a little distant from the Ashram.

When I informed Naina of my decision, he generously offered to let me have his plot of land, on which my house now stands, and plans were drawn up for a mud hut—I really wanted to live in one at a cost of about Rs. 300/-. The menace of rats (I dread them) infesting the mud hut, held out by Naina, made me decide in favour of a pucca construction.

Bhagavan permits my stay

It was said that Bhagavan would not permit a married woman to live away from her family and home, and that He would not view with favour the idea of my building a residence for myself. I was very happy that day when He asked me as I entered the old Hall, "So you are going to build yourself a house here". To express His approval of my plans I had gone to Bombay. His Highness the Maharaja Dhurmpore

invited me to his place. As soon as I went the first thing he did was to take me to his prayer room. As soon as I entered and sat down I saw a beautiful photo of Mother Parvathi. I could not take my eyes off that picture. It seemed alive. As I sat for a long time the photo actually entered into me. I told Maharaj that strangely enough this picture has taken my Heart. He simply smiled and said "Yes, you are right. It is alive and performing miracles in my life." After some time, I informed him that I was leaving for my ashram. So surprisingly he came to the Boribunder station with his staff with a big wooden box parcel. I asked him, "What is this?" He said, "When you open it, you will know." On my return here I opened the box and to my greatest happiness I saw the wonderful Mother's picture—an exact copy—just one thing—His Highness's was very big and this smaller. Immediately I took it up to my meditation room. I had a Mohammedan woman servant. She was always against my *sadhana*. As you know Mohammedans never like this sort of worship. She always spoke against this picture and others. Many a time I rebuked her—almost threatened her—but to no avail. One night she was as usual sleeping near me upstairs. Suddenly, she heard a noise and what she saw was that same Mother from the picture come out and take her hand and put it on my bed and smile and disappear. She could not sleep after that. Next morning she seemed dazed and behaved strangely. I asked her—why she would not say anything. In the afternoon she came and told me what had happened—then I told her "Now you see. These are not pictures but they are more true than we are." After that she was changed. Daily she would go up and clean my prayer-table and put any amount of flowers. Not only she but two or three others also had such experiences with this great picture. |

Bhagavan approves

I may relate here an incident which may be quite relevant to the events narrated.

I Decide

My way of life and attitude to it, the yearnings of my heart were in dissonance with that of all my relations. I was quite alone in my family to tread the path I did, the rest of them going the worldly way and holding me to ridicule for what I chose to do. Although they just tolerated me, once I was the recipient of a 'stinker' from one of my sisters, who, at least I thought, should have a greater appreciation for my ways. I took that letter to Bhagavan who remarked that if one member of a family chose to tread the path of spirituality, by that very act the rest of the family would derive immense benefit and be protected from evil. I informed my sister, that far from railing at me for my ways, they had every reason to thank me as they are protected from unknown and unseen dangers.

Foundation on Good Friday

The foundation stone was laid for my house one day, and as instructed by Nana, I took on a plate, coconut fruit and flowers as offering to Bhagavan. My feeling at what then happened defy words to describe. Gracious Bhagavan with His charming smile in His ever gentle soft voice asked me, "Do you know today is Good Friday?" I was not aware of it. I felt I had the blessings not only of Lord Buddha and Sri Ramana, but of Jesus Christ also, in building my house. I am not in the least fanciful in making this statement. Friends, guests, visitors and servants of all communities, nations and religions have had visions of Bhagavan in my residence and have told me so. My only regret is that I did not request Bhagavan to set His blessed feet in my residence; He would not have refused that request had I made it. But Bhagavan in His infinite grace has made up for my lack. I know and I feel Bhagavan's presence always with me in my residence as many of my friends do too.

Completing the construction, in the progress of which Bhagavan took keen interest and daily made enquiries, I took leave of Bhagavan with no light heart to leave for Bombay

and from there, in the company of my friend B and her son, I left on a voyage to the United States of America to see the world-famed exhibition in San Francisco and New York.

Looking down the vista of long years that have now elapsed since that day I decided to build my house here, I am tempted to ask, was it accident or destiny that brought Mr. Bose into the ashram office on my very first visit on 9th November 1937, when the *sarvadhikari* asked me to go to the town for the night and I was ready to take the night train back to Madras? Had not Mr. Bose recognized me, recalled himself to my memory and offered to accommodate me in his house, I would have bidden goodbye to Sri Ramanashram. Or, was it the grace of Bhagavan?

VI

SILKEN BONDS OF DIVINE LOVE

My second visit to the Ashram—Rajagopal received me—Uma Devi from Poland—Bhagavan's Method of Teaching.

These following few lines changed my Destiny:

"A weak frail woman who knows how to find God's peace through prayers can do more to save the nations of the world than all the intellectuals combined."

My second visit to the Ashram

It was in the year 1939 that I paid my second visit to Ramanashram. This time I came to fight with Maharshi. It was my second visit, my first visit was in 1937. Between 1937 and 1939, I was at Buddha Gaya for some time doing my *vaidhana*. Later during the period, I went to Australia. On my return from Australia, I went to Tiruvannamalai intending to take the "Old Swami" to task for having failed me grievously over my project of a "Home of Devotion" in Bombay, which had to be abandoned. I was greatly upset over this failure, for I had thought to myself that I had secured the blessing of the Maharshi at Tiruvannamalai when I first came to see Him in 1937 about the scheme. But of this later.

Rajagopal received me

On reaching the ashram on this second visit, I was met at the gate by Bhagavan's attendant Sri Rajagopal, a lively and jolly person. Recognizing me at once, he asked me immediately what had happened to the project for which

I had sought the blessing of Bhagavan during my earlier visit in 1937. My anger knew no bounds. I told him what I thought of "that old humbug" who had misled me to think that the project had His blessings, only to find within a few months that it had collapsed altogether. I told Rajagopal that I had come to take Bhagavan to task for failing me so grievously. I had come to him on the suggestion of a friend, all the way from Bombay amidst various privations to obtain His blessings. Well, I was quite some time at the ashram in the presence of Bhagavan and did not find it in me to open the topic, let alone take the "Old man" to task.

Uma Devi from Poland

Among those in the hall was Uma Devi, a Polish lady, who was telling Bhagavan that she had collected a sum of Rs. 15,000 and a number of boxes of clothes for being sent to the refugees from Poland to a camp in India. Although Bhagavan seemed uninterested she went on repeating her achievements in this direction with a view obviously to draw Bhagavan's approval of the work she had done.

Bhagavan, having by now heard the story for the third time, with his infinite patience, slowly turned the revolving shelf near his couch, took out a copy of an issue of *The Kalyana Kalpataru* and picking out a passage with ease as if at random, asked the journal to be shown to Uma Devi for her to read. I had then been for some time in Tiruvannamalai and had not found it possible to express what I had come to tell Bhagavan. On this occasion I was sitting next to Uma Devi and with that womanly curiosity looked over her shoulder at the passage with a smile that perhaps seemed to Bhagavan to be cynical, when he made the remark, 'That is for you, too', which made me look more closely at the passage to find why Bhagavan said so.

"A weak, frail woman who knows how to find God's peace through prayers can do more to save the nations

of the world than all the intellectuals combined."

Bhagavan's Method of Teaching

The meaning of that passage was utterly clear and definite for me. From that moment I felt that my place was at the feet of this master, who without a word said, could understand the workings of the human mind and find the answer to its troubles. From that day Bhagavan's infinite patience and grace guided me, not directly but no less decisively and infallibly. I, who was full of passions like anger and jealousy, could hardly carry such a project through to a successful conclusion. One must first conquer oneself to be able to take on such onerous tasks as I had intended to. Had Bhagavan told me so in so many words, I am sure I would have flung up even in his presence, hurled in a fit of temper some words perhaps I would in leisure regret but could not recall. How gently yet firmly and forcefully He acted and how great was His thoughtfulness for the welfare of the people who came to seek His help. He had with no words of His own conquered me so completely. From that day onwards I knew no master who could hold me so as He did. To this day I remain bound to His feet faster than one can be with hooks of steel—with bonds of love, to Him who was and is the personification of Love in all its plentitude, grace and majesty.

VII

SACRED SPOTS

Purchase of Tiruchuli House—Losing and regaining the diamond rings—Ramana Mandiram—Patalalinga Temple—My first meeting with Mr. Tarapore and his family—Governor-General's visit to the Opening Ceremony—Kumbhabhishekam—Construction of Samadhi—O. P. Ramaswami Reddiar—Swami Niranjanadasa—Chadwick's two illnesses.

Purchase of Tiruchuli House

In my travels around the world, I have seen and also have heard that places associated with the great men of the several countries I journeyed through have been preserved, in some instances as national memorials, and that these countries have honoured their great men in other ways also. One such memorial I have seen in England is to Shakespeare at Stratford-on-Avon, a visit to which is a 'must' for any visitor to that country. So also is the Lincoln Memorial in the U.S.A. The thought of these spots dedicated to the memory of the great of their land came upon me one evening as I was sitting idly with Viswanathaswamy upon the parapet of the well in Ramanashram. On enquiry I was told that Bhagavan was born in the village of Tiruchuli in the Ramanathapuram district, but none knew who was the owner or who was in possession of the house Bhagavan was born in. It was a pity that none of Bhagavan's devotees ever thought of Bhagavan's birthplace. My restless energy made me pursue these enquiries. I resolved that the birthplace should be purchased and preserved as a memorial to Bhagavan, as I considered Him the greatest among the great, and as others besides me, Indians and others, also subscribed to this view. Negotiations were therefore set on foot for the purchase of the house and as soon as it came to be known that the house was to be purchased by

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a Bombay lady, the price, as usual, was put up, but thanks to the indefatigable efforts of an old lawyer-devotee, Shri Ranganathan, the price was settled at a reasonable figure and the sale put through. My friends, Shri Pestonjee Mahaluxmiwalla and Shri Govindram Seksaria each had given as a gift to me personally, sums of Rs. 2500 each, which made up the consideration for the sale.

The house was in bad repair, but soon was made suitable for the purpose for which it was intended. The *sarvadhikari* was in a great hurry to perform the house-warming ceremony. He approached Bhagavan who asked him if he would do the ceremony without me. Mrs. Taleyarkhan (i.e. myself)—who had helped to purchase the house, as I was then in Bombay, and the *sarvadhikari* asked me to return to the ashram for the ceremony—and on my return, a party of about thirty of us left for Tiruchuli. On the way, I stayed at Madurai with Mr. P. M. Madhavan, then District Superintendent of Police there. He made all arrangements for our onward journey to, and return from Tiruchuli. The Dewan of Ramanathapuram was present with us on the occasion of the ceremony which was performed in a fitting manner and was enjoyed greatly by the company then present.

Losing and Regaining the Diamond Rings

A thrilling example of the pervasive grace and power to work miracles may now be cited here. I was bathing in the river Papanasam in Tiruchuli one day along with Mrs. Anantamarayanan and was washing my luxurious long hair, vigorously cleaning it with my hands. We then returned to our residence, when Mr. David McIver who had come with me, invited my attention to the fact that the three eternity diamond rings I used to wear on my finger were missing. They must have slipped in the river which was flowing fast, full of water, besides being full of sand in the bed. I then felt that the rings must be given up as lost. I made no bones about it, although the *sarvadhikari* was

upset about it and made such a commotion that we could hardly eat our lunch in peace. While resting that afternoon, my bearer who had accompanied me on the journey came and gave me the very rings I thought were lost for good, saying that a youthful cowboy had given them to him. I called for the boy to give him a reward, but lo! he had vanished and could not be found. I felt it could be no human being who found the rings and restored them to me and I was convinced that it must be Bhagavan Himself who had done me that favour of restoring the valued rings. As was usual with me to report the day's events every day to Bhagavan, that evening too I wrote a detailed report of the incident—of the loss and restoration of the rings. I also said that it was the grace of Bhagavan that had restored my rings to me. As usual Bhagavan read out the letter in the Old Hall to those present. Completing the task at Tiruchuli, we returned to the ashram. I entered the hall and prostrated before Bhagavan. The first question He asked me was of those rings. I took them out of my finger and handed them over to Bhagavan. He put them on His beautiful fingers. I was tempted to ask Bhagavan to keep the rings there, but the thought that the ashram office would immediately claim them, deterred me from yielding to this impulse. These rings were however stolen from my house several years later.

Ramana Mandiram

On our way to Tiruchuli, at Madurai, our party being a large one, was accommodated in several houses. We went to see the famous Sri Meenakshi Temple and on the way, the lawyer Shri Ranganathan pointed out to me the house in Chokkappa Naicker Street where Bhagavan had lived as a student and where He attained that illumination which turned the student Venkataraman into the latter-day Bhagavan Ramana. We saw the house and again I felt the urge that this house too should be bought and preserved as a memorial to Bhagavan. And Shri Ranganathan was again

helpful in arranging for the purchase, the funds for which were provided at my request by Shri Raja Reddy, a wealthy zamindar who had been my guest at the ashram and who had made a few motion-picture shots of Bhagavan. This house is known as Sri Ramana Mandiram and the house at Tiruchuli as Sri Sundara Mandiram, in memory and honour of Sri Sundaram Iyer, Bhagavan's father, who had worked as a private lawyer there.

Patulalinga Temple

Although I had seen marks on the person of Bhagavan of insect bites suffered by Him during a period before I came to the ashram, my curiosity had not been sufficiently excited to enquire how Bhagavan came by these marks for quite a long while. One day in reply to a question put to Him, Bhagavan said that they were the legacy of the days He spent at the Patulalinga Shrine, very early in His life here. Bhagavan desired me to see the place. I had not seen it before. He asked me to take me to the Sri Annamachaleswarar Temple one evening. Nanna pointed out to a part of the thousand-pillared mantap as the place where the shrine referred to by Bhagavan was. We could hardly approach the place, so dirty it was, having been used as a public lavatory rather than as a shrine. This news saddened Bhagavan and He remarked in a sad, soft and gentle voice: "Oh, they have no other place but this for that purpose. Do you know the place is a very sacred one and is the samadhi of a very great saint." I felt that that must be the reason for Bhagavan having chosen that spot for his austerities and something impelled me to say: "I will do up the shrine and see that the place is put to its proper purpose." Bhagavan asked me: "Oh, will you?" and I reaffirmed my intention, although I did not know then what I had undertaken. I had not been to the south for many years and hardly knew any people and had avoided the members of my community for the reason that I was looked down as a renegade, having given up 'high life' for the life of a sadhu. However, I finally decided to approach Shri Kaikoo Parekh,

who was almost a son to me, and for this purpose left for Madras in the company of Shri R. Narayana Iyer, Sub-registrar. I told Shri Kaikoo of my problem and suddenly thought of Shri Ramnath Goenka in this connection. When I went to Shri Goenka, Dr. P. Subbaroyan, then Minister with the Government of Madras was with him. Cordially received, I told Shri Goenka of my mission. Shri Goenka had heard of my family and although surprised that I should be in an ashram, offered me all help and wanted to know the probable cost. I estimated this would be about Rs. 10,000. He was willing to give me the entire sum then, but as I preferred to take the money required in instalments, he gave me a cheque in my name for Rs. 2,500. Thanking this fine gentleman for his help and blessing him, I left that place, came to the ashram, told Bhagavan and gave the cheque to the *sarvadhikari* who proceeded to spend it as he thought fit, nominating his own men for different purposes without consulting me, except to tell me that the money was not sufficient and asking me to provide more funds. Irritated beyond measure that I should have been overlooked in the matter of the plans he had made, I told him that he had no right to do what he had done, as the money was given to me and that I would not thereafter hand him any money for the purpose. I had not forgotten an earlier experience of mine with the office in the matter of handing them money for any specific purpose. I was agitated with what the office had done and felt I was being exploited and told Bhagavan that I was proceeding to Madras to see what should be done in the matter. With Bhagavan's permission I left for Madras and met Shri Goenka who seemed not surprised at what had happened and told me he had given the money to me to do what I liked with it. I was in a fix and told Shri Goenka that I would meet him later after deciding my course of action and apprised my friend Shri Kaikoo Parekh of my plight.

My First Meeting with Mr. Tarapore and his Family

Shri Kaikoo Parekh asked me not to worry and to be ready

to accompany him that afternoon when he would take me to the right person to help me. I did not know whom or what he had in mind. I soon found myself at the gate of a residence bearing the name-plate of Shri Tarapore. Then I wanted to get away as I did not like to meet the members of my community. However, it was too late for any protest and I found myself at the portico being welcomed by Mrs. Tarapore

Dharmmai and her beautiful daughter Dina Mai. They put me at ease at once and I overcame the sense of uneasiness I had felt on entering their building. A sumptuous tea was laid out for us, after which Kaikoo coolly asked me to hand over to Shri Tarapore the plans which at Tiruvannamalai itself I had got prepared by the *Shapathi* who was engaged in the construction of the Sri Mathrubutheswara Temple in the shrine. I did not then know that Shri Tarapore was himself an architect of high repute or that he was to play a most important part in my life thereafter, providing me food, love and care, such as I have never before enjoyed or that it was a day of destiny for me. That was how it was to be and I took it that it was so because of Bhagavan's grace. Shri Tarapore took the plans and asked me to meet him at his office the next day when he put me some questions and then told me simply to leave the thing to him saying that whatever was required would be done. When I mentioned this to Shri Goenka, he was not inclined to believe me as he felt that the work was too small for one of the status of Shri Tarapore to undertake and yet he wished me good luck. I wrote to Bhagavan a long letter of my good luck that Shri Tarapore had undertaken the entire responsibility of the construction of the shrine of Sri Patalalinga. I told Him also how I felt considerably relieved in that the ashram would have little to do in that matter. Of course this irritated the *sarvadhikari* considerably because his finger was not in the pie. Bhagavan, however, expressed His satisfaction with what I had arranged. I asked the office to return to me the amount given to me by Shri Goenka as the same was given to me personally and

not on behalf of the ashram, but to this day it has not been returned!

Shri Tarapore and his engineers came a week later, inspected the place and set to work on the construction of the temple. Removing the accumulated dirt itself was something of a problem. Bhagavan evinced considerable interest, as usual with Him, and I reported daily to Him the progress of the scheme. Experts had been engaged by Shri Tarapore on the work and he and his family would often come to Tiruvannamalai to inspect the progress of the work and to satisfy themselves thereon. On all these occasions they never failed to pay their respects to Bhagavan. As the temple was nearing completion, I told Bhagavan that I was approaching Shri Rajaji, then Governor of Bengal, to perform the opening ceremony. With Bhagavan's blessings I wrote and Shri Rajaji readily agreed to my request.

Before, however, the temple could be got ready to be opened by Shri Rajaji, he had been elevated as the Governor-General of India, the first and the last Indian to occupy that exalted office, and the ashram was happy that I would not be in a position to get down that high dignitary for such a function and would gladly see me discomfited. In February 1949, Shri Rajaji, then Governor-General, wrote to tell me that he was coming to the South and gave me three dates to choose from for the function. That came as a bit of a shock to me and I had also a 'phone call for the same purpose. I was quite nonplussed and as in every such situation, ran to Bhagavan who asked me what I proposed to do. I told Bhagavan that I could not get the Governor-General to open an unfinished temple and that, with Bhagavan's blessings, I would request him to go over when it was ready. I sent Shri Rajaji a telegram reading: "Cannot manage, writing letter," and followed it up with a detailed letter explaining my difficulty.

Shri Tarapore evinced the greatest interest in the progress of the work and helped to expedite the work. The *muhurtam*

for the auspicious opening of the temple was ultimately fixed for 14th May 1949. I informed Shri Rajaji accordingly that I was arranging a suitable reception to the Governor-General on his arrival here.

I had undertaken the task of cleaning up the two big tanks in the temple premises, the waters of which were stinking from the accumulated moss and dirt. I may here be permitted to digress and state what had happened a few years earlier.

I was so much absorbed in my Lord that I had no other thought. Suddenly someone asked about Arunachala Temple. I had no idea of the temple. So I asked Bhagavan about this great temple. Bhagavan said, "You must go and see it", and asked dear Naina to take me. Hearing this, all the other devotees also wanted to accompany us. So one night all of us went. We went hardly half the way when a sepoy stopped Naina and started discussing with him. Somehow I felt this was something about me, so I inquired if there was any enquiry about me. Dear Naina did not want to embarrass me and said that they were taking me to be a non-Hindu, as non-Hindus were not at all allowed into the temple. Immediately I went and saw the Executive Officer, who understood me and took us all inside. When I went to Mother Payathi in the temple, I nearly cried and said — "Oh Ma, if you are a real Mother, then see that today's merit should give me the chance to serve you in such a way that one day my name would be in this Temple." I was not aware of what I was saying, and lo and behold, five years later, I took up the Patalalinga work, which I shall ever cherish as the great Mother's answer to my prayer.

A new task had come my way now and I set about it in a big way, rushing pumps from Polur and Vellore and seeing to it that both the tanks received the long overdue spring cleaning. I saw to it that the entire premises of the temple was made spick and span for the function and in this task the then Executive Officer of the temple was of immense help.

Governor-General's visit to the opening ceremony

That one of the status of the Governor-General of India should come down to a small place like Tiruvannamalai and that too for the opening of a small temple which was only an adjunct to the main temple, created a stir not only in Tiruvannamalai, but also in Madras. I was engaged in getting up a proper reception for Shri Rajaji not only because of the high position he occupied but also because he was a great friend of mine and was deeply interested in me. My trials started when at 7 p.m. one day I returned home tired to find the temple Executive Officer and another gentleman, who was secretary to a Minister of the Government of Madras awaiting me to tell me that the Governor-General would not be attending the function as it was too small a function for one of his eminence to participate in and that it had been so decided by Dr. T. S. S. Rajan, Minister for Religious Endowments with the Government of Madras. That really upset me and I ran to Bhagavan, who gave me a look of such grace as made me take heart. I realized there and then that still I would come out with flying colours. With Bhagavan's blessings, I rushed to Madras to contact the Minister. I met Dr. Rajan at the Secretariat. I must here say I was kept waiting for quite some time there. I was quite excited at the delay and opened the door and went in. Dr. Rajan told me he was busy, but I said I was busier. I straightaway asked him what made him say that Shri Rajaji would not come to Tiruvannamalai for the function. Dr. Rajan said that he and Shri Rajaji were great friends, had been in jail together and that considering his eminence, he would be advising Shri Rajaji to cancel his programme. I requested him to put through a trunk call to New Delhi; he hesitated but finally gave in, and in 15 minutes we contacted the Military Secretary, Col. Bannerjee. Even as Dr. Rajan was speaking over the phone, I snatched it from him and told the Military Secretary that I must speak to the Governor-General himself. I was almost in tears when I heard the soft sweet voice of Shri Rajaji

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over the phone, telling me that nothing would stop him from keeping a promise once made and that he would come down to Tiruvannamalai for the function, whomsoever objected to it. He told me not to cry and asked me whether I felt happy with his assurance. I was indeed happy, more happy than I could express, and put the phone down. I left the Minister's room abruptly, not bothering to take leave of a man who had so crudely let his small vanity come in my way.

The arrangements at Tiruvannamalai were vigorously pushed through. I saw to it personally that all the stations on the railway line from Madras to Tiruvannamalai received the long overdue coat of whitewash and that the houses lining the streets of the town of Tiruvannamalai along which Shri Rajaji was to pass were also whitewashed and gaily decorated. The town of Tiruvannamalai was also brilliantly lit up so that Shri Rajaji could have some idea of the reception planned for him from his special train itself. In all this work Shri Dorairaj, Collector, and Mr. Harvey, the Superintendent of Police, were of great help to me. Shri M. Bhaktavatsalam, then a Minister in the Government of Madras, and all the members of his family whom I had invited, came on the eve of the function with a wagon-load of furniture and accessories necessary for the reception. That evening I had a special puja performed at the shrine of the Mother, praying for Her blessings for the success of the function. The Governor-General's special train steamed in at 9 p.m. bearing the Governor-General, as also the Governor of Madras, The Maharajah of Bhavanagar and the Maharani. Shri Rajaji sent me a message asking me to call on him early on the morning of the 14th. When I met him he handed me the message Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and his daughter Maniben had sent me through him and which they had handed to him as he was leaving Rashtrapathi Bhavan. Shri Rajaji drove in an open car of Shri Tarapore's to the well-decorated temple where they performed the opening of the

newly-constructed temple of Sri Patalalinga. On entering, he asked Shri Tarapore to put up a plate in English and Tamil to commemorate the occasion, which was done subsequently. He went down the steps and graciously prostrated to the lingam there. Going round the tower, he admired the figure of Siva on it. Thereafter he came to the artistically decorated rostrum put up in front of the shrine, where, after my welcome speech, he spoke. The texts of both speeches are found in the Appendix. Shri Rajaji made it a point to mention that I who hailed from Bombay had now become one of Tamil Nadu by adoption. After the function, the Maharajah and Maharani of Bhavanagar left for the ashram for darshan of Bhagavan and Shri Rajaji drove back to the train. After lunch, Shri Rajaji bade us goodbye and the train left for Bangalore, not however, before he had effected a reconciliation between Dr. Rajan and me. The message Shri Rajaji and the Military Secretary sent me from Bangalore are given in the Appendix.

That evening the A.I.R. broadcast a recording of the function at the temple which Bhagavan heard with rapt attention. When the broadcast was over, Bhagavan said with a sigh of relief that for three or four days He was moving in dread lest I should pick Him up and take Him to the function. What an opportunity I had missed, I shouted, but Bhagavan motioned me kindly to resume my seat and said He was much relieved.

A little later, someone informed Bhagavan that a fee was being levied for admission into the newly constructed temple. Bhagavan asked me if it was true and pointed out the informant, who affirmed it. Immediately, I wrote a strong letter to the Executive Officer to stop that practice. Bhagavan said that no levy ought to be made for entry into the temple.

Kumbhabhishekam

The *Kumbhabhishekam* that ought to have followed in the wake of the opening of the temple could not, however, be

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performed as, as is well known, Bhagavan fell seriously ill in the latter half of 1949 and attained Mahanirvana in 1950, leaving us all too dejected to think of anything. The trials of the ashram that lasted quite a few years, my own preoccupations and troubles all contributed to the postponement. In 1966 I felt that it was high time to perform it; to raise funds therefore I wrote to a few friends of mine. I was able to raise a sum of Rs. 17,200 within a few weeks. The temple authorities coming to know of my intention asked for the formation of a committee. Sensing nothing sinister in the move, I agreed after some hesitation and in consultation with my friend Balaram. After the formation of the committee, the intention became plain to me that they wanted the money to be transferred to the name of one of them as Treasurer. I would not, as the money was given to me personally by my friends to make a trust for the purpose of worship at the shrine and I told them that out of the sum, Rs. 15,000 must be deposited in an irrevocable trust and the balance alone utilised for the *Kumbhabhishekam* expenses. It was quite a surprise to me to receive a summons from court in this matter at their instance and all that helped to postpone the function further, even though August 22, 1966 had been fixed for it. Engineers sent by Shri Tarapore for effecting renovations of the shrine to get it ready for *Kumbhabhishekam* were denied co-operation by the temple authorities. Nevertheless they were carried out with the help of those neighbouring citizens and shop-owners who were generous enough on that behalf. On August 22nd, 1966 I had taken a few friends and my nephew Bobby and his wife Dina from Bombay to the shrine to find that at the instance of one of the temple trustees the door of the shrine had been locked — a door which was kept open every day for 17 years since its construction. Feeling humiliated before my family and friends, I sat down crying and turned towards Arunachaleswara pleading, "Oh, Arunachala, how can you allow such grievous wrong to be done to one who worked hard and made this a

beautiful temple where lakhs of people have enjoyed and were benefited? To that very person the door was locked. I pour out my sorrow to you and beg you to do me the justice for this heartbreaking wrong or right. But how will I know that you have heard my heart's cry? I must be given some proof." Some time passed after this incident. One early morning, I think it was November 1966, a dear friend Sai Das came running to me excitedly and said, "Oh, Ma, did you hear last night a great thing had happened. Shri Arunachala burst. It was like an earthquake. Round about all the villagers came running to see." It is a rare event in this century. My heart stopped beating when I heard this. I felt a strange sensation in my whole body. Silently I lifted my eyes in prayer to Arunachala for showing me in this indubitable manner His grace. I clung more firmly than ever and was reminded of what Bhagavan had said, "The Hill is flesh and blood and we are stones."—To continue the story, it turned out that I had no occasion to go to the court at all, and the proceedings instituted against me caused me little worry. Shri Nedunchezian, Minister in the Government of Madras, saw me and expressed his regret at the action of the temple authorities and the case was withdrawn. In consultation with the authorities, November 3, 1968 was fixed for *Kumbhabhishekam* being done in the presence of Sardar Ujjal Singh, Governor of Madras and Sardarini Ujjal Singh. The *Kumbhabhishekam* although performed on a lesser scale than the opening ceremony, was quite an impressive one with all Vedic rites performed in due order and in the presence of the elite of the town; a large gathering of devotees from Bombay attended. Not a little of the success of the function owes to the co-operation of the district officials, Shri P. M. Belliappa, Collector, Shri R. Kaliappa, Superintendent of Police and to Shri A. Radhakrishnan, Commissioner for Hindu Religious Endowments, and last but not the least to the energetic Shri Chidambaram, the temple Executive Officer. Shri K.K. Shah, then Minister for Broadcasting, New Delhi, was

very kind to arrange at short notice for the recording of the function and for its broadcast from the A.I.R. Tiruchi, three days after the event. I am indebted for this to Mr. and Mrs. K. K. Shah as also to the concerned authorities at the Tiruchi station of A.I.R.

An irrevocable trust for Rs. 15,000 has been endowed for the performance of daily puja at this shrine as regularly as at the other shrines within the temple of Shri Arunachaleswara. All's well that ends well.

Suddenly one fine early morning dear Sai Das brought me this great news of Arunachala's answer to my prayer. There and then silently I lifted my hand to Arunachala and said, "Oh my Lord, poor as I am, how can I show my gratitude to you for answering my prayers, and as a deep gratitude for answering my prayers and as a deep gratitude for such grace, the only thing I could do is to perform the sacred *Homa* ceremony at Thy feet, at the sight of the wide crack from the top to the bottom, separating the mountain." My thanks are due to Mr. Chidambaram, the Executive Officer of the Arunachala Temple and the committee members who took special interest and care to help me to perform the *Homa* most successfully on November 2nd 1969. It was a grand function and the religious rites were performed according to the ancient tradition in a perfect manner. I am grateful to His Holiness Shri Sankaracharya for sending me His blessings that never in the history such a thing is done on the hill itself, which is most unique. Herein I am reproducing the speech of one of the trustees of the temple.

[Speech delivered by Shri T. V. Subramanian Chettiar, Trustee of Sri Arunachaleswarar Devasthanam, on 2-11-'69 at the foot hill of Arunachala on the occasion of *Shanti Homam* performed by Ma. F. Taleyarkhan.]

"Ladies and Gentlemen!

The very thought of Tiruvannamalai will bring salvation.

So the Tiruvannamalai *sthalam* is the easiest way for salvation. Many saints lived here only to attain salvation. Among the notable saints Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi was one who lived in recent years. Among the disciples of Ramana Ma. F. Taleyarkhan is a close associate of Ramana Maharshi. After her arrival to this sacred place Taleyarkhan has done yeoman service to this place so as to make it known to all. Only with her great efforts the Pathalalingam cave, where Ramana Maharshi was in penance in early days, was renovated and it was inaugurated on a grand scale by His Excellency the then Governor-General of India Shri Chakravathy Rajagopalachariar in the year 1949. Again Ma. F. Taleyarkhan collected Rs. 20,000 from her philanthropic friends, and earmarked the funds for the performance of daily *puja* to the Pathalalingam. *Kumbhabhishekam* to Pathalalingam was performed on 3-11-'68 on a grand scale in the presence of His Excellency Sardar Ujjal Singh, the Governor of Tamil Nadu at a cost of Rs. 2,000. The present *Shanti Homam* is also performed at a cost of Rs. 2,000 for the welfare of mankind in the world. But my dear Ma. has mentioned in her speech that with the performance of *Shanti Homam puja* her work is over. I do not agree with her in this.

An important and noble task to be attended to with the co-operation of our dear Ma. F. Taleyarkhan is the renovation work. Renovation has to be done as a whole to the temple of Lord Arunachaleswarar. The last *Kumbhabhishekam* was performed some 25 years ago. Now we have to take up the huge 9 towers' renovation work. To effect repairs and to perform *Kumbhabhishekam* it would cost nearly Rs. 20 to 25 lakhs. Only after finishing this noble work her mission to this sacred place will be complete.

Once again I request my dear and respected Ma. to co-operate with the temple authorities to fulfil the noble task of renovation to Lord Arunachaleswarar. I pray the Lord Arunachaleswarar to give strength and determination to Ma. to fulfil the *tiruppani* work to Lord Arunachaleswarar.

Sacred Spots

This I specially mention that Arunachala is the great Lord himself, who hears our prayers, pleadings and fulfills our sincere prayers.

Shanti Homa that is performed here today, though the cause for it is a secret of the gods (*Deva Rahasya*) is many million times superior to idol worship, as it is an expression in action of the words of Bhagavan Shri Ramana Maharshi:

"Of several holy places sanctified by the presence of the Divine, Kailas is deemed supreme; even that Kailas is only the abode of the Divine, not the Divine Himself. But Arunachala is Divine Himself, that is why better than idol worship, here is considered *giri pradhakshina* (going round the hill)."

These are the golden words of the Maharshi. That not only devotees but the gods of the gods here perform *giri pradhakshana* a few times a year is well-known.

That Maheswara who today is in the form of this Hill when he appeared as a Column of Light was worshipped by Brahma and Vishnu; but now that worship is in the form of *Deepa Darshan* once a year (on Full-moon day—November/December). None has been known to worship the Divine as is now being worshipped. Shrimathi Taleyarkhan, an ardent devotee eminently deserves the plaudits of all devotees in attempting to resurrect this ancient worship of the Divine.

Long live the *Vaidic* way!

Thank you all."

During the long period of nearly fifty-four years that Bhagavan was in the body, from September 1, 1896 when He arrived as an unknown youth in Tiruvannamalai till April 14, 1950 when He attained *Mahanirvana* in a blaze of glory, Bhagavan never left the vicinity of the sacred hill. The Hill, He said, had drawn Him to itself. As He put it to a certain distinguished personage, if the hill were taken along He would follow the hill wherever it went! In this long

period He had made a home in several spots and one or the other of them must be dear to the numerous devotees. To me the three spots mentioned above—the house in Tiruchuli where Bhagavan was born, the house in Madurai where the lad Venkataraman attained *jivanmukthi*, and the shrine where for months in the very early days He spent His time rapt in deep absorption in the Absolute,—the spots associated with Him before He crossed the teens—were most sacred and it was Bhagavan's grace, love and kindness that made me the instrument in preserving them for posterity in the form they are now in and revered for their association with this Silent Sage of Arunagiri.

Construction of Samadhi

It was indeed a further piece of my good fortune that I had something to do with the place where the sacred body of Bhagavan was interred. After the initial shock of the passing of Bhagavan was over, devotees then present at the ashram on April 14, 1950, discussed the problem of the interment of the body. Differences sprang up between the *Sarvadhikari* and me almost inevitably. The former would have it near the wall of the New Hall opposite the bookshop but I would have none of it and suggested the present spot. Shri Omandur Ramaswami Reddiar, then Chief Minister of the Government of Madras and an ardent devotee of Bhagavan, supported me, as also some other influential devotees. The *Sarvadhikari* pointed out that the *samadhi* at the spot indicated by me should be quite a large one and would cost a lot of money. I countered, pointing out that if it had been possible for me to find the sum of over Rs. 100,000 to build the *samadhi* of Lord's mother and the New Hall, how could I be squeamish when it came to building the *samadhi* of one amongst the greatest rishis of India — my own Lord? I offered then and there — impulsive as I am — to build the *samadhi*. This promise that I made then was destined to be fulfilled by the grace of Bhagavan over-riding

all obstacles in the way. First Major A. W. Chadwick and later Miss Merston were entrusted with the work but they both gave it up. The work of the *samadhi* was dragging its feet, much to the intense disgust of Bhagavan's devotees. The manager was freely giving it out that the building would be completed only by his grandson or great grandson, and not before. He would even take pride in having said so, whatever reaction it provoked in the minds of his hearers. When however the Board of Trustees came to be appointed under the scheme framed for the management of the ashram by the Sub-Court at Vellore, Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami and I were on it and with the co-operation of Shri K. Srinivasachari, a member appointed as the representative of the Government on the Board, the Board at its meeting on 17th September 1961 passed a resolution reading: "The *mantapam* construction work is entrusted to Mrs. Taleyarkhan who is requested to take charge immediately and choose and co-opt men to help her to execute the work as quickly as possible." I am glad to say that if ever there was any resolution of the Board of Trustees that was put into effect against the opposition of the manager, this was one and that too because of the grace of Bhagavan. Not relying entirely on this resolution of the Board to take up the work, I consulted two well-known saints who severally assured me that I would complete the *samadhi* task successfully. One of them warned me of three persons inimically disposed towards me and assured me of his support in my efforts to complete the *samadhi* and that he would take care to see that my enemies did not succeed in their machinations.

Out of several applicants who responded to the advertisement in the papers, I selected an assistant to help me with the work and was bent on the early completion of the *samadhi*. I would be with the stone masons, morning and evening urging them to get the work done efficiently and quickly. The close personal watch thus kept did expedite the work although several obstacles came in the way such as

lack of finance, etc. Once, I had to rush to Madras to get a resolution passed by the Board in circulation to authorize the transfer of funds held by the ashram in one account or other to the *samadhi* fund account. The manager as usual was obstructive to a degree and refused to transfer these funds to help the early completion of the *samadhi*, but he was foiled, I am glad to say. On August 22, 1966 the *gopuram* went up and on December 26, in that same year the *samadhi* was almost completed except for the fencing around the *samadhi*. Thus work kept pending for 17 long years got completed in 17 months, thanks to the grace of Bhagavan.

Foolishly thinking that I would be permitted to continue this work, I had drawn up plans for a beautiful fence of stainless steel with gates to be put up around the *samadhi*, and to invite Shri Ma Ananda Mayi, Shri Godavari Mata, Shri Ramaa Devi, Mother Krishna Bai, Shri Swami Muktananda Paramahansa and other spiritual personalities to grace the function of the *Kumbhabhishekam* as also to invite the leading dignitaries of the Governments, Central and State, and other leaders in all walks of life all over India to be present on the occasion so that the function would live in the memory of people not only of the town of Tiruvannamalai but of India too, as befits the incomparable Sage, Ramana. Also, I had plans for the building of a hall in front of Bhagavan's *samadhi* for being used for meditation by *sadhakas* who frequent the ashram from far and wide.

On December 26, 1966 there was a final meeting of the first Board of Trustees which I could not attend on account of the illness of my aged mother. I had told the manager so when he came to see me at my residence. Behind my back and without even a word of prior intimation to me, he got a resolution passed at that meeting relieving me of the *samadhi* work in view—so the resolution ran—of my 'failing health' and appointing his son Ganesan to be in charge. Devotees can see for themselves the tinsel of the fencing put around the *samadhi* and the condition it has been reduced to even in the

short time it has been put up; and those who attended the function of the *Kumbhabhishekam* (over which the manager, who has every reason to be indebted to me not only for the help I rendered him in connection with the management of the ashram but also personally to him and every member of his family, did not even choose to consult me) will agree with me that the function was far from as grand as it should have been.

But I must not complain. It was not self-aggrandisement that I sought. I desired only to do what I thought must be done to preserve for posterity the various reports associated with this great Sage and to bring home to posterity His greatness.

His birth place, the place where for quite a long time He was in the deep absorption of the Infinite and finally the last resting place of the mortal remains we knew as Bhagavan. In accomplishing these tasks, Bhagavan blessed me with His infinite grace. If it was not given to me to be in charge of the celebration of the *Kumbhabhishekam*, I believe it must be because I did not think of it on the night of the *Mahanirvana* when I dreamed to see the *samadhi* built, by me.

O. P. Ramaswami Reddiar

I have purposely reserved to the end a reference to Shri Omandur P. Ramaswami Reddiar. This ardent devotee of Bhagavan was Chief Minister, Madras, when I undertook the construction of the shrine of Sri Patalalinga. It would have been quite impossible to have taken this task on hand but for his help and interest in allotting this portion of the thousand-pillared *mantapam* for this purpose. He was present for the ceremony of turning the first sod and it was he who laid the foundation stone for Bhagavan's *samadhi* too and encouraged me when I took up that work. Devotees of Bhagavan are aware of his deep spiritual quest and the noble work he does at Vandalur in South Arcot District. May Bhagavan bless this noble soul!

Swami Niranjanadasa

Swamiji Niranjanadasa, *Sarvadhikari*, was a great devotee of his

Mother. I was told that while dying she requested Bhagavan to look after him and be with him. Later on devotees made him the Manager. Though not at all educated or refined, he was very kind-hearted and very hard working. His great pleasure was to feed people. When any visitors came to the ashram the first thing he would do was to give them something to eat or drink. His favourite plantains were hilly three-corner ones. If he was pleased with you, then he would offer you three-corner. If he gave you a round one, then you must know that he was not very pleased with you. Many a time I used to make his Secretary Mouni laugh if he would offer the round plantain. I would refuse saying "Why Swamiji, why? Are you angry with me?" After the *Mahasamadhi* of Bhagavan this poor man had very hard times. Many devotees were against him and were ready to put the whole family out. Many unpleasant happenings took place. But I had love for him, so always stood by him. Anxiety and fright made him very ill. So we removed him to an ashram dispensary. First he was very annoyed with me for removing him there. But later on he knew that I was nursing him day and night. Viswanathaswamy and Kittu who is now doing *pūja*, we three were attending on him. He was so afraid of his life that he would not take medicine or food unless I tasted it. The moment, I would say—"Swamiji, I just go home for food," he would say "Please come soon". My sister and Major Chadwick were going to Madras, so they came to say goodbye to him. My sister said, "Look, my sister is not coming to Madras to see me off. So Major Chadwick has kindly offered to take me". Swamiji turned round and said most pathetically, "I have looked after hundreds of people. Where are they now? No one is even inquiring about me, except Taleyarkhan—alone". Thereupon my sister Mrs. Capadia said, "You must bless her," and took me near him. He put his hand on my head and said, "I feel Bhagavan's hand is on your head. Bless you. Forgive me if I have any time hurt you. I never knew that you have a

heart of gold. You are proving it by your service to me." I could not control tears pouring down my cheek. I said to Swamiji, "It is better to have one sincere loving friend than many without true feelings. Have no fear, I shall be always near you". His last wish was that I should close his eyes at the last moment. Mr. Cohen and I sat by his side till the last, and I am glad I fulfilled my promise to a man who served the ashram with the greatest devotion, love and service.

Chadwick's Two illnesses

I took Chadwick to Madras to Mr. Tarapore, who very kindly arranged with Dr. Mohan Rao's Hospital his prostate operation. I stayed with him looking after him. Mr. Tarapore did everything to meet his expenses. He returned hale and hearty.

After a time he developed severe jaundice. Dr. Hugo and I thought it best to take him to G. M. C. Hospital at Vellore. We both stayed with him for a few days and returned. We received a wire from Mr. Cohen, a devout devotee of Bhagavan: "condition serious come". So we left at night for Vellore and at 11 p.m. when we reached there, we could hear him shouting. Seeing Hugo and me he was so pleased. We both stood by his side. All the doctors and nurses were doing their best. At last I asked them to leave him alone. Meanwhile he said, "Look, look someone is standing in that corner and wants to shake hands with me." So Hugo said, "No, it is the glucose bottle". He turned to me and said, "See, Ma, what he is saying? This man in white clothes is extending his hand." I at once knew it was Lord Jesus, though he was Ramana Maharshi. Yet his graciousness to come to take him. Immediately his terrible breathing got silent and smooth, his eyes became so soft and nice, and early in the morning at 4 o'clock he left his body.

VIII

SHRI CHAKRA PUJA AND VEDA PATASALA

Major Chadwick's interest in Shri Chakra Puja and Veda Patasala—
Shri Jugal Kishore Birla's grant—Mr. Osborne.

Major Chadwick's interest in Shri Chakra Puja and Veda Patasala

It is well known that, after Bhagavan's *Mahanirvana*, ashram affairs were a headache to all concerned. We reached a crisis in these affairs when we had seriously to consider the closing down of the dining Hall. The late Shri T.K. Sundaresa Iyer, who combined in him great devotion to Bhagavan and to Shri Ganapathi Muni and was for a very long number of years closely associated with Bhagavan and the ashram, approached me with the suggestion of instituting the weekly Shri Chakra Puja at the ashram so as to invoke the blessings of Goddess Shri Lakshmi for the prosperity of the ashram, but I was not inclined to agree. Readers may have read of the installation of the Meru Shri Chakra in the ashram in the premises of the Shri Mathrubuthesvara Temple by Bhagavan in Major Chadwick's book, and I do not intend to refer to this here. Shri Sundaresa Iyer broached the subject to Major Chadwick and together they tried to persuade me to approve of the idea as also to take steps for the revival of the Veda Patasala at the ashram. I made the first contribution of Rs. 20 for the first month's expenses of the *puja*, then fixed at Rs. 5 per *puja*. At our request, Major Chadwick took charge of the *puja* and until ill-health obliged him to hand over to the ashram. The *puja* became popular with the ashram

Shri Chakra Puja and Veda Patasala

devotees who had many a material want to pray for; thus it considerably augmented the revenues of the ashram and the fee for the *puja* came to be raised subsequently to Rs. 10. Major Chadwick, as in all things he undertook, took a deep personal interest in the proper performance of the *puja* at the shrine every Friday, the first of the Tamil month and on full moon days. He could be seen sitting before the shrine when the *puja* was going on in the shrine and his very presence there acted as a tonic to the priests, six in number, to perform the *puja* with deep faith and interest and in a solemn and impressive manner. This personal supervision, I am sorry to say, has been missing since he gave up charge. The lackness is lamentably enough reflected in the *puja* too, although the *puja* continues to be performed as regularly as before.

Shri Jugal Kishore Birla's Grant

As for the revival of the Veda Patasala, I approached Shri Jugal Kishore Birla. I have referred to him elsewhere at some length with a request that he may make an annual grant of Rs. 1,500, towards the expenses of the *Patasala*. Kind and generous and deeply interested in Vedic religion, and in matters spiritual, Shri Jugal Kishorji very kindly responded with the grant of that amount by the All India Arya (Hindu) Dharma Seva Sangh, Delhi, and the first cheque of Rs. 1,500 was sent to me. This grant continued during the lifetime of Shri J. K. Birla without any question. On his passing away in 1967 the Sangh wanted to examine the merits of the grant made a long while ago, and asked me about the institution. Major Chadwick had passed away in 1962 and the management of the *Patasala* passed from him to the ashram with the attendant neglect. The number of boys fell steeply and the quality of studies also deteriorated for want of that attention and personal care that Major Chadwick gave to it. Major Chadwick was greatly interested in both Shri Chakra Puja and in the *Patasala* as they were institutions in which Bhagavan

had been interested. Taking into consideration all the circumstances, the grant was withheld by the Seva Sangh.

Mr. Osborne

The ashram authorities felt profoundly upset by this development. They induced Mr. Osborne, an Englishman and the editor of the quarterly journal, *The Mountain Path* issued from the ashram to write to the Sangh protesting against the withholding of the grant and suggesting that I was at the bottom of the mischief. The letters on this subject are given in the Appendix. I feel, however, that I must invite attention to the fact that if it is true that I was after 'power' as Mr. Osborne alleged, then, Mr. Osborne could not have forgotten that, that power was mine both when the British were in power in India and later too, as any reader of these pages may find. The suggestion seemed to be childish coming from one who ought to have known better. Second, had he cared to verify it, he would have easily known that Major Chadwick did not know Shri J. K. Birla and that the grant was made at my instance. Perhaps Mr. Osborne in writing the letter had forgotten to whom he owed the jobs he referred to in that letter, or an earlier one in a leading daily of Madras, a job which he would not hold, or even the Foreword to his book 'Ramana Maharshi' by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, then Vice-President of India. I have enjoyed the love of sincere friends, no matter in what position they may be. I shall not, however, think any *the less of the English people* or their qualities of fair play and good sportsmanship only because of one supposed to be their countryman who *chose to sell his soul for a pittance*.

IX

ASHRAM BUILDINGS

Maharajah of Morvi—Construction of Guest Rooms—Building of the Shrine of Shri Matrubutheswarar and the New Hall—Shri Balaram Reddy.

Readers can read elsewhere about the interest taken by me in the construction of buildings for institutions concerned with the spread of the spiritual message such as Shri Ramanashram, Krishna Mission and the Yogoda Sat Sanga. I evinced keen interest in Ramanashram also, although the effect here was entirely different from what I had with the other two institutions. They were interested in their objective, construction and raising funds being only secondary to serve the main purpose. That made all the difference between Ramanashram and those institutions. Ramana Maharshi was the personification of *Vedanta*.

Maharajah of Morvi

I had noted the lack of conveniences in the ashram I had been accustomed to move with in Bombay. The opportunity came my way to supply this want. On return from Bombay to Tiruvannamalai I had to go to Mysore to condole H. H. the Maharani of Mysore on her bereavement because H. H. the Maharajah had died. The Maharani was surprised to learn I was in Ramanashram. There I met Their Highnesses the Maharajah and Maharani of Morvi and I interested them in Bhagavan, as I told them the stories of Bhagavan as I knew them and also as I had been told. As they were interested, I invited them to pay us a visit. After a few days Mr. Oza, the Secretary of H. H. of Morvi came to see what arrangement

could be made for their stay and comfort. Seeing no rooms or place where they could sit or rest, he told me that they could not come. I suggested they must come. "Let them come in a saloon," I said. I wrote to the Maharajah, "The best thing for you would be to come by saloon and stay comfortably there and come to ashram for the Bhagavan's darshan."

Before they reached the ashram, Bhagavan had sent word to the ashram office warning them not to approach Their Highnesses for anything whatever, but to leave it to me at whose instance they had come. Prior to taking leave the Maharajah asked me what they should give to the ashram. I informed him of the lack of a suitable guest house and suggested that he could build a guest house at the place. Readily agreeing he asked me the probable cost and gave me the sum of Rs. 7,500/- for the purpose. This I handed over to the *Sarvadhikari* mentioning to him the purpose it was intended for.

With the aid of a retired engineer, then resident in the ashram, the *Sarvadhikari* without any faintest reference to me spent the money in the construction of a stone wall all round and sent for me asking me for more funds for the guest house. I was exasperated with this breach of trust by him and told Bhagavan so, who however was helpless as He never interested Himself in such matters. Much as I may be disgusted with the office, I was keen on the guest house and approached Their Highnesses again with a sad face for further help. They obliged and this enabled me put the fully furnished Morvi Guest House, just opposite the entrance of the ashram.

I had noticed a large plot of land about four acres in extent, next to Mr. Bose's compound and wished to build thereon a decent guest house for the convenience of the numerous visitors from India and abroad who began to surge into the ashram, hearing of the great sage through the works of Mr. Paul Brunton. For this purpose, I had promises of aid to the tune of Rs. 50,000 from friends of mine whose word was as good as cash on hand.

Ashram Buildings

I tried to keep this project secret from the ashram office. But I was surprised one morning to see my good friend Sri Balaram at my door telling me that the *Sarvadhikari* was greatly displeased with me for collecting this money without telling him, as if I cared two pins for his opinion. I told Balaram that I had only promises and no cash with me then but my word was not trusted. Perhaps some one of the residents in the ashram I had consulted on the purchase of the land had leaked it out to the *Sarvadhikari* to gain some favour from him. As I was very angry at this move of the *Sarvadhikari*, I wrote a letter to Bhagavan that I collected no money but had received only promises of donations. This incident made me feel so bad that I wanted to get out of the ashram. I did not visit the ashram for quite some time. But Bhagavan used to enquire of Mr. Cohen about me and apparently he told Bhagavan that I was angry with Bhagavan. "With me," asked Bhagavan. "Do tell her to come." That night I dreamt I was alone in the Old Hall, sitting near Him and touching His feet, with tears in my eyes. Bhagavan spoke, "I know your love for me. See how much I suffer. Can you not suffer just a little for my sake". I awoke, and that morning went to the ashram with Mr. Cohen. How lovingly did Bhagavan receive me! I have no words to describe it.

One morning as I entered the Old Hall, Bhagavan beckoned me to his side and told me, "Go and see D. He is lying on the verandah of Shri Devaraja Mudaliar's cottage, seriously ill." I did not know why Bhagavan sent me there but I obeyed. D. was surrounded by his wife and few ladies of the ashram and was apparently dying. I called him by his name, put three spoonfuls of water in his mouth when he breathed his last, asking me to pardon him. Sometime later I learnt that D. had told the *Sarvadhikari* that I had collected money for a Guest House. I do not know how Bhagavan knew it, but the reason why Bhagavan sent me to the death-bed of D. was apparent!

Although I then decided to hold on here under any circumstances I totally dropped the Guest House scheme and informed Bhagavan accordingly.

Construction of Guest Rooms

Sometime in 1960 and after *Mahasamadhi*, before the framing of a scheme by the court for the management of the ashram, at my instance and pressure the manager undertook the building and completion of six guest rooms within the ashram with some modern amenities for accommodating visitors flocking in large numbers from the west. It was no easy task to persuade the manager, yet I think he knows better now. It was again at my instance that an ugly thatched shed near the ashram entrance used as a bathroom was removed and a more substantial one put up away from the main ashram buildings at the eastern end of the grounds to serve the needs of visitors.

Building of the Shrine of Shri Mathrubutheswarar and the New Hall

I had some part to play in the raising of funds to the extent of nearly over Rs. 100,000 for the building of the *shrine of Sri Mathrubutheswarar* and the New Hall. The *Sarvadhikari* would hand me a list of names of devotees in places like Bangalore and Madras asking me to meet them to raise funds. On many such missions, I would be accompanied, in Bangalore by Shri B. M. S. Naidu and in Madras, by Shri R. R. Dalavai. We had many interesting experiences in these fund-raising campaigns. Some of the prominent men we met would disclaim even knowledge of the existence of the ashram, while others had tales of the treatment meted out to them by the *Sarvadhikari*, which made them turn their backs on the ashram. But most of them were acquainted with me and my family and even while wondering why I came to the ashram, would give me cheques for sums of Rs. 151 or 101 telling me to do what I liked with money. Most of the

Ashram Buildings

Cheques were made out in my name and would be sent every day to the ashram duly endorsed in favour of the ashram.

Shri Balaram Reddy

I happen to remember one of the many amusing incidents I had on this occasion. Very early one morning, Shri Balaram Reddy—ever the mediator between me and the ashram, good humouredly misrepresenting me to the ashram and the ashram to me for the good of all—was at my door with a message from the *Sarvadhikari* that I must immediately leave for a certain place in the district of Thanjavur to meet some relation of Shri Topas Swami for funds badly needed for the construction of the big Hall. I declined as I had hardly time to get ready to reach the station in time for the train leaving at 10.00 A.M. The *Sarvadhikari* would not be put off. Popo and Shri D. S. S. then agent of the Central Bank of India Ltd. Madras, to spare his cat, he bundled me, Shri H. H. and Shri Topas Swami into it, to reach Villupuram just in time to catch the train to our destination. The persons I had to meet were very rich landladies recently widowed and observing *puduh*. I had to meet them alone, condole with them and hear their tale of woe, while my friends waited for me at the door. We were there for three days. Each day my companions were growing more restive and asking me to broach the subject to my hosts. I did it on the third day and came out with a cheque. The friends who were as jittery as those sitting on a volcano burst out on finding that the cheque was not to their expectation. Exasperated I blasted out at them. All of us cooled down in the end with a hearty laugh and came back to the pleased *Sarvadhikari*.

I would like here specially to emphasize that in all these fund-raising campaigns, Bhagavan was never interested and did not ever associate himself with them. Once, the *Sarvadhikari*, Shri Ranganathan, the lawyer devotee and I met as He emerged from His ablutions. We told Him of our efforts to raise large funds for the construction work on hand and

said that we could succeed only with His Grace and blessings. In His usual majestic, slow and measured way, Bhagavan turned round to me and said, 'I hope you are not using my name for raising funds.' I said, 'We are not. We are doing it on our own.'

Although the New Hall was open for use in 1949 Bhagavan would not use it for giving *darshan*. I pleaded with Him to use the hall for our sake and read out an address to Him on the first occasion of His use of the Hall. Bhagavan's heart might not have been in the Hall. But the gracious and loving Bhagavan that He was, just to make us happy entered the Hall and took His elevated seat there.

He was ill with sarcoma and He used this Hall for some time only. One day He went into the bathroom near the present *Nirvana* room, and emerging from it, sat down in the *Nirvana* room. It was here that some articles for His use were stored. He did not leave it for the New Hall and none could make Him relax there.

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LIFE IN THE ASHRAM

Talk at my back—A lady swallowed a locket of Bhagavan's photo.—
Swamy's arrest—My photo with Lord Ramana—Arakandanallur
Temple—A few motion pictures of Bhagavan—Film shows in the
Ashram—Rajagopal's son had a snake bite—A drunkard gives up
drinking—Lentil fever—A party of musicians—The Miraculous Song
The Governor of Pondicherry visits the Ashram—Artists from Poland
came to the Ashram—"Tune on your inner Radio set"—A Tantrik
worshipper goes frantic but cured—Jivanmukhta has no family rela-
tions—Your door will be immediately opened—Bhagavan's miracles.

Talk at my back

At the outset let me say that no illusion should be entertained that life in the ashram is very different from that in the world. That is my experience arrived at after three decades of my stay in the ashram. My husband was quite right when he said that life in the ashram would be no better than in Bombay, the charm is the world in miniature. "Perhaps there are more snakes in the grass there," my husband would often say. True, a few sincere people try to follow the path of liberation chalked out by the Master but sooner or later they find themselves outside the ashram. It is said that the spiritual path is 'the flight of the alone to the alone', and the earnest seeker, perhaps with the blessings of the Master, is happier outside the ashram than within. It is good to be born in a church, but bad to die in it. All the joys and sorrows one has in the world, its absurdities, its jealousies and vanities as also its heroines and loves can be met with in the ashram as much as in the world. One may miss this or that in life in the world but cannot miss anything in the ashram. The ashram is alas the world sometimes at its worst compressed in a small compass. The few experiences jotted down here may not fully bear out the

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conclusion set out, but they have been arrived at after considerable thought.

When a new arrival at the ashram, I knew no Tamil and had to talk in English with the menfolk, Major Chadwick, Mr. Cohen, Mr. MacIver and others. The women who had gathered around Bhagavan had known little of the society I had moved in. They were not well-educated either. They were appalling, prudish. I was often the subject matter for lively talk. Although I could hardly follow the discussion, I could judge they were gossiping about me. One day, I burst out, and asked the *Sarvadhikari* to let me give these people a piece of my mind. I had known in society the most handsome men and beautiful women to whom they could hardly hold a candle. When my outburst came along a crowd gathered to watch the incident. The *Sarvadhikari* was frightened. News of this reached Bhagavan's ears who sent for Rajagopal to find out the cause. That night while at dinner at my house with guests who had come to pay their respects to Bhagavan, I asked Rajagopal to tell the women concerned that "I was a woman with a woman and a man with a man untiring and devoted in the service of the ashram. So leave her alone." Next morning as I entered the ashram, the *Sarvadhikari* came out of the office and pacified me lovingly. Mouni, his educated and cultured secretary, asked me not to mind what these people said. I was upset that in an ashram especially dedicated to individual *atmavichara* such malicious gossip was possible. But as soon as I entered the Hall, in Bhagavan's presence, these silly thoughts were altogether effaced by the calm wisdom flowing from Him.

A lady swallowed a locket of Bhagavan's photo

Once I was convalescing in my residence after an operation by Dr. John of Tirukoilur. Although I was unable to go to the ashram my neighbour Rajagopal, Bhagavan's attendant would tell me of all that happened there every day. Two incidents I recall during this period. A lady smitten with a

deep love for Bhagavan swallowed a locket containing Bhagavan's photo. Rajagopal came running to tell me that Bhagavan had asked me to look after this lady. I was unable to get out of my house and so asked a good quantity of castor oil be given to her. To my great relief, the locket with its pin locked on was flushed out.

Sivadas's arrest

A few days after this incident, Shri Rajagopal and Shri Ramanath Iyer told me that Sivadas, a devotee of the ashram, had been arrested by the police on a charge of theft and that Bhagavan had asked me to intercede with the police. The police would not be satisfied with a note for the purpose. I went in person to the Police station. I saw Sivadas looking forlorn in the lock up. The Deputy Superintendent fortunately was there, and accepting the version I gave, he released Sivadas and I returned home.

My photo with my Lord Ramana

In the early years of my life here I would spend the winter at the ashram and the rest of the year at Bombay. At Bombay once I dreamt that I was at the ashram and that Bhagavan called me to be photographed along with Him. Returning to the ashram, I was sitting on the parapet of the wall with a friend, when some one told me that Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami had sent for me to come up to him. I had not known or met Dr. Krishnaswami before and therefore refused. He came again saying that Bhagavan had asked me to come up. I found Bhagavan seated on the stone steps near the dispensary in the ashram to be photographed along with Mrs. Dhar by Dr. Krishnaswami. Bhagavan beckoned to me to sit on the ground near His feet for the photograph. That was how I came to know and to love Dr. Krishnaswami, whose friendship I cherish. I found him the most loving and sincere out of all Bhagavan's devotees. All the photos one sees all over India and elsewhere today are taken by him. I consider

Dr. Krishnaswami a true devotee. He stood by the ashram like a rock at a time when no devotee came forward to help. I found him of all the devotees, most loyal and straightforward, always a true and dependable friend who could sincerely stand by you. Our joint efforts for the better management in the ashram would cover a volume but sufficient mention has been made of it in these pages.

Arakandanallur Temple

Bhagavan's *darshan* of the Jyoti and Arunachaleswara from the temple at Arakandanallur on his way from Madurai is well known. On a visit to Tirukoilur at the invitation of a friend there, I wanted to see this temple. I reached the temple in the company of Viswanathaswamy. It is situated on a rock in the river bed. It was 11 a.m. and we found its doors locked with a big lock. There was not a soul about. My companion took me to the spot where Saint Thyagaraja is reputed to have sung in praise of the Lord Arunachala, praying to show His light. I could hardly make out anything of all this. I was very anxious to see the Lord inside the temple. We were doing the circuit of the temple when we saw fresh milk flowing out of the outlet as though some *abhishekam* was being performed within. It surprised us as the door was locked. Opposite this spot is the temple of the Lord's consort, Parvathi. We both went in and prayed to Her to let us see the shrine whence Bhagavan had *darshan* of the Jyoti at Arunachala. Completing the circuit, I noted with surprise that the temple door was slightly ajar and asked Viswanathaswamy to follow. A tall grey-haired old man came smiling toward us and took us into the temple. It was all dark, but he did the *arti* and gave us *prasadam*. My companion then showed me the spot I was so anxious to see. Thanking the old man profusely, we came out. But I had failed to offer him the usual *dakshina*. I tried to go in but the door was locked. The old man could not have passed us without our noticing him; our driver too did not see him pass. It was

a mystery. Who was this old man? We returned to the ashram, and my companion told Bhagavan of our experience. I told Bhagavan that it seemed to me that it was He who in the fullness of His grace had helped us at the temple that day. How charmingly innocent Bhagavan seemed! He turned to the people in the Hall and said that I always imputed such 'miracles' to Him. My companion for all his learning could offer no other explanation for this mystery.

A few Motion Pictures of Bhagavan

A few motion picture shots of Bhagavan's life were made at my request by Shri Raja Reddy, a wealthy landlord of Hyderabad despite objection from the ashram office. I also desired to make a recording of the voice of Bhagavan so sweet and moving, as though it came out of Heaven, in its most gracious mood. I told Bhagavan that I intended to make a 'talkie' of Bhagavan. He just smiled as if to tell me that He knew it would not be permitted by the ashram office. Thanks to the objection of the ashram, my project did not go through.

Bhagavan's Golden Jubilee—the fiftieth year of his arrival at Tiruvannamalai—was proposed to be celebrated on a grand scale. I thought I could contribute to the festivities of the occasion by arranging for a dance recital by a famous dancer. The office allowed me just five minutes for this show. Poor innocents—I thought, and dropped the idea. Shri Devaraja Mudaliar returned to the ashram a few days later and recounted to Bhagavan the story of the Maharashtra saint, Dnyaneshwar. He had seen a film of Dnyaneshwar's life at Madras. The pandits teased the saint over his lack of vedic knowledge. But that saint made a buffalo recite the *Vedas* by merely touching it. Shri Devaraja Mudaliar's lively account interested Bhagavan greatly. He asked several questions regarding this film and this provoked quite a lively discussion. Then it struck me, "Why not arrange for a film show or shows on this great occasion." Difficulties loomed ahead, as they always did, in regard to so many projects and as

always from the ashram office. But Bhagavan's grace as usual, wrought a miracle—*Mookam Karodhi Vaachaalam, pangum langayate girim*—I give below an account of what happened in this connection—

Film shows in the Ashram

Mrs. Anantanarayanan, wife of Shri M. Anantanarayanan, who retired recently from the High Court of Madras, wanted me to go with her to a local travelling cinema to witness the life of a saint. The theatre was near my house. Some 25 of us went to see the film. During the interval, Mr. Mani, the Manager of the theatre, introduced himself to me and asked to be allowed to meet me at my residence the next day. He told me that he would be obliged if I could put in a word with the district officials for an extension of their licence for three months to enable them to take advantage of the big crowds the great festival of Karthikai Deepam would be attracting to Tiruvannamalai. I in return asked him if he would help me put up the film shows in the ashram on the occasion of the Jubilee. His bosses at Madras came down to see me one Sunday and agreed to lend their equipment costing over a hundred thousand rupees for the purpose I had in view. I took these gentlemen to Bhagavan and prayed for Bhagavan's grace for them and told Bhagavan of my plans for the Jubilee. Bhagavan remarked sweetly, "Oh, so you are going to show films," and discussed the plans for them with us. The task of setting up the machinery was a difficult one and it took us a fortnight to rig up a theatre in the dining hall which was hardly suited for that purpose. But somehow this was done and the hall was ready for a film show. My heart was literally in mouth on the first day the films were to be exhibited. But my fears were unnecessary. The show was a grand success, thanks to the grace of Bhagavan. The first film shown was Ram Rajya. This was followed by films about Tukaram, Dnyaneshwar, the Vatican, Charlie Chaplin and some others making eight films in all.

Bhakta Chukka film was shown one day. The story is that the man used to go to a singer woman and every one knew that his character was bad. Later some miracle happened and he entirely changed and became a great saint. The widowed women were also there. Next day, they told Swamiji Niranjanadasa that Taleyarkhan was spoiling Bhagavan's character by showing such films. Swami called me into the office next day and told me to stop the picture now, as all these women were complaining. I told him that last night when they were saying this I asked them to go out of the hall, so that they may not see the bad picture. They said, 'We have seen half, so let us go through it now.' Why did they not go out? I went straight to Bhagavan and informed Him that these women were saying that I was spoiling Bhagavan's character by showing such bad films. Immediately Bhagavan sent for the life story of the Saint and started reading it to all and showed them how human beings change in a minute.

All these shows were miraculously successful, not by mere human effort, but Bhagavan's grace. The miracle lay not only in the faultless mechanical perfection in setting up the complicated equipment, but also in obtaining the films from the late Shri S. S. Vasan of the Gemini Studios, Madras. A vote of thanks was made at the end of the shows by the late Professor T. K. Doraiswami Iyer to me.

Rajagopal's son had a snake bite

Shri Rajagopal, Bhagavan's attendant and my neighbour, had a fine young son two-three years old. One night about 8 p.m. the child was bitten by a snake and froth was issuing from his mouth. The grief-stricken parent took him in his arms, ran to Bhagavan and laid him at His feet mumbling incoherently, "Bhagavan, this boy—this boy." Gracious Bhagavan patted the boy, passed His hands over him and asked Rajagopal not to worry. The boy recovered and is a fine young man today.

A drunkard gives up drinking

An aristocrat friend of mine was my guest for a little while and told me of her woes. Married to a fine upright gentleman, kind and considerate, she was however worried over her husband's addiction to drink. Obviously the matter could not be raised publicly in the hall. I advised the lady to meet Bhagavan alone. I assured her that Bhagavan would see His way to help her. A fortnight later when she had gone back to her place her husband returned home about 8 p.m. after a day long picnic and went to bed skipping dinner. An hour or two afterwards, this gentleman rushed out of his bedroom and even before he could reach the staircase to go down began to vomit, the stench from which filled the air and disgusted the couple. The doctor was sent for and he advised rest in bed. After this incident the husband felt such nausea for liquor that he never would even look at the tray at dinner. The happy lady asked me to convey her *pranams* to Bhagavan for the relief granted to her. I met Bhagavan when He was alone near the cowshed and as I related this story, He expressed His astonishment, as though He had heard of it from me for the first time.

Enteric fever

G, a rich society lady of my community, was a widow with one son and one daughter. The son once fell ill with enteric fever. The doctors gave up hope. The boy was taken home with a nurse to attend on him round the clock. G. gave me these facts in a letter and asked if I could do anything for the boy. This letter was handed to me while in the Old Hall and I gave it to Bhagavan. As usual, He read it with care and kindness. Reaching home, I replied to G. enclosing some *vibhuti prasad*. The very morning that I showed this letter to Bhagavan the boy who had been in a state of coma showed significant evidence of recovering. The astounded nurse informed the doctor of this, although he said earlier that further visits would be pointless. The boy got well soon

Life in the Ashram

and the grateful G. asked what service she could render to Bhagavan in gratitude. I told her that Bhagavan was above all material needs but that she and her children could visit Bhagavan and pay their respects in person to Him. They came and stayed with me for a fortnight. On the first day, Bhagavan asked them to lunch at the ashram and cast kindly looks at G. while it was on. In the course of our talk at home, G. assured me that she had taken no part in the campaign to malign me in Bombay for coming to the ashram, deserting my family. I could only say that being the protected of one whom she herself had seen and who was God himself, I could hardly be bothered by any campaigns.

A party of Musicians

A party of musicians headed by a lady vocalist on their way to Kumbakonam for a festive occasion came to the ashram and were in the Old Hall. I asked them to sing a few songs saying that Bhagavan was interested in music. The chief songster pleaded that she had a bad throat and asked her accompanist, a young girl, to sing; at my insistence she accompanied her in a weak voice. Bhagavan on rising to go up the hill at His usual hour expressed His pleasure at the recital. The lady thanked me for the opportunity they had to sing before Bhagavan and told me of her predicament in having a bad throat on the eve of a concert for which she had already been paid. She feared she might be unable to fulfil the engagement. I told her that having been blessed by Bhagavan, she could confidently look forward not only to a successful recital but also to one vastly better than ever. A letter I got from them sometime later told me that this indeed was the case.

The Miraculous song

To be childless after fifteen years of marriage is indeed a source of sorrow to both husband and wife. To one such lady I told of a song, the singing of which would bless one with a

child and asked her to sing this song before Bhagavan. She sang this song and in time became the mother of a bonny boy.

The Governor of Pondicherry visits the Ashram

The Governor of Pondicherry, then a French possession, once visited the ashram without prior notice. He entered the Old Hall and garlanded Bhagavan with an excellent garland of flowers, unaware of the conventions at the ashram. Bhagavan graciously took it out, placed it near His feet, and directed an attendant to offer a chair for the distinguished visitor, who was dressed in stiff military uniform. Knowing that a useful conversation in English was not possible for him, Bhagavan looked at him graciously and benevolently. While the visitor closed his eyes absolute silence prevailed in the hall. A short time passed and the visitor came out of his 'trance like' state, crying out aloud 'Bhagavan, No, Bhagavan, No, I am not yet ready in English.' He repeated this thrice. He then remained in the hall until the bell rang to announce lunch and as he would not stay for it, he took leave of Bhagavan with a deep, low bow, thanking Bhagavan and hoping to come again. Such occasions as these seem to have been rare in the ashram history. One could never tell who, how or why—but few visitors have been revealed that Light either in Bhagavan's presence or by Bhagavan.

Artists from Poland come to the Ashram

A party of ballet artistes from Poland, visited the ashram at the instance of Uma Devi, whom I have referred to earlier. It was arranged that they should give a performance in the evening. Bhagavan asked if it would be in the Old Hall as He would not ordinarily be in the hall in the evening. The performance was fixed to take place in the open ground adjoining the Old Hall, and so Bhagavan was informed. The performance began at 5 p.m. and lasted quite some time and all of us noted how immensely delighted Bhagavan was with it. At the end of the show, the artistes filed past and He

blessed them. Calling me aside Bhagavan made enquiries about food for the party and was informed it had been arranged for at the ashram itself. He was particular to enquire if their food would be free from chillies which might not be to the taste of the visitor-artistes. In the dining hall the members of the party were all seated in a row and they were well attended to. Always Bhagavan showed a tender concern for the comforts of visitors, high or low, Indian or foreign, known or unknown. It is unfortunate that this is no longer in evidence at the ashram.

"Tune on your inner Radio set"

An Indian gentleman who had spent about an year in Germany and had brought down with him an expensive radio set was rather worried that it was not working and that there was none at hand to set it right. He carried his worries to Bhagavan, perhaps expecting Bhagavan to set the radio right. Little did he (or we) know Bhagavan. In a consoling voice Bhagavan referred to his worries over the radio, its cost, the lack of a mechanic to set it right and so on. Then began something unusual. He said to the visitor that if he tried to tune his own inner radio with eyes closed he could hear and speak to any country in the world and elsewhere too. A peal of laughter shook the hall then. Little did we realise that the joke was on us too.

A tantrik worshipper goes frantic but cured

N, a Keralite and a Tantrik initiate, once came to the ashram. Something, I do not know what, went wrong with him, and one day he came to the Old Hall clad only in *kaupin* and standing next to Bhagavan said he too would sit on the couch. Bhagavan invited him not only to sit on the couch but on His lap as well. I, however, could not put up with it and forced N. out of the hall. At this he threatened me saying, "You will regret this." I didn't mind the threat. He went out of the hall and away from the ashram too. Years later, long after

Mahasamadhi, he paid a visit to the ashram and recognising me thanked me for what I had done. Recently too he was on a visit to the ashram when he gladly renewed his acquaintance with me.

Jivanmukhta has no family relations

A vexed question often heatedly discussed in the ashram among visitors and residents was about who constituted Bhagavan's family—blood relations or others. To these endless questions Bhagavan never gave any answer. On one occasion He made an exception to say that a *jivanmukhta's* family consists of those disciples who follow the *jivanmukhta's* tenets, practise them, and bring their *sadhana* to a successful conclusion becoming themselves *jivanmukhtas*. No one of us, certainly none among Bhagavan's blood relations, can stand this test.

So vexed was I at this question that I found occasion to discuss it with Shri Rajaji and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. They both confirmed that this view alone was right and that we would be pulling Bhagavan down from His high pedestal besides doing Him a great injustice if we named anybody else a member of Bhagavan's family.

One of the four Sankaracharyas to whom I paid my respects in the company of a Minister of the State in which His Holiness was then camping, also confirmed this view, almost in the same terms. This Sankaracharya knew my family and status as also of my activities and interest in Bhagavan and His ashram, of which not too creditable reports had reached him. He told me that only such a one as had followed the precepts and practised the *sadhana* laid down by a *jivanmukhta* of the high status of Bhagavan, could ever claim to be a member of Bhagavan's family and that mere blood relationship confers no passport to that status. He cited the instance of Shri Adi Sankaracharya who came to His mother at her death bed only to perform her obsequies; of Lord Buddha who disclaimed all relations even when they were His followers and

members of the *Sangha*. Jesus publicly disowned the doctrine of relationship by blood and affirmed his marvellously individual view, a view identical with Ramana's.

Dr. Sujata, a French lady with a clinic in the town, would spend her spare hours in the Old Hall, eyes closed in meditation as did many others too. She had often twitted me for not attempting to sit down for meditation in Bhagavan's presence. I used to spend the whole time gazing at Bhagavan, my little store of patience drawing to its end. I was irked enough to remark, "Why don't you meditate for me too?" The tone I said it in drew Bhagavan's attention. He would never ask a question but His look would convey His interest. I told Bhagavan why Dr. Sujata had taken me to task, and repeated my reply to her. Then Bhagavan remarked, "Oh, Oh, so all these people who have closed their eyes, if only they know what is happening there," at which all eyes were opened. I told Bhagavan that for me just gazing at Bhagavan was more than meditation to which gracious Bhagavan said 'yes.'

Your door will be immediately opened

Mr. Cohen who always discussed things with me, strongly affirmed that only *Jnana* and not *Bhakti* (Love) could work out final liberation. My reply, one day after a hot discussion was that I would rather take any number of births to be only a *Bhakta* and nothing else. I told Bhagavan about my *Prema Bhakti*. His words were warm in approval. He said, "The Door Will Be Immediately Opened For You." After that we never had any more argument on this subject. While writing this it occurred to me that some readers might misunderstand what has been said here. My *sadhana* is Love. I always feel each one has his or her own faith in his own way. One must have that inward feeling. There is so much darkness of selfishness and strife of cruelty and hatred and pride. In such a time Love and cry to the Lord to lift you up. Pray to Him and ask Him to be with you. One who is a man of prayers carries the Light of heaven in his

face. Our prayers will then give us a strange power, and we shall know that we have been answered. High education, vast study of the scriptures, rich offerings and wealth are not necessary for attaining God-Realisation. What is really wanted is Purity of Heart and sincere devotion. To me the real wealth of the world is peace of mind and heart for my *sadhana* is love. Mr. Cohen who was my immediate neighbour was of great help to me. I considered him as a member of my family. He used to have his food with me for years and years and he has written the most wonderful books about Bhagavan. I think his "Guru Ramana" is very interesting and clear. After Bhagavan had attained *Samadhi* there was great turmoil in the ashram. He was then of great help to Swami Niranjana and Venkataraman. But the time came when he did not feel like staying here. It is a pity that so many such devotees left the ashram.

Bhagavan's Miracles

Why did I not title this chapter 'Bhagavan's Miracles?' The reason is quite simple. He Himself asked once, "Was Jesus aware that He was performing miracles?" Thoughts and wishes, provided of course they are good and worthy, expressed verbally or mentally by us, supplicants in the presence of great souls—the Mahatmas—are fulfilled without any volition on the part of the Mahatmas. Therefore, they are no miracles, which in the forty verses (Supplement 16) is pointed out by Bhagavan to be the result of volition.

XI

THE LAST ILLNESS

Blood wet cushions—Bhagavan suffered patiently—A great soul leaves us—My Lord's body departs—Rangaswami, Bhagavan's attendant.

The course of the last illness of Bhagavan in the latter part of 1949 ending with *Mahasamadhi* in 1950 has been often described and particularly in Mr. Cohen's 'Guru Ramana'. There is little need for me to go over it again. I had little to do, but watch, common with other devotees, the course of the disease with deep concern. My recollections of this period are set down here.

A fourth operation had been decided upon. In my anxiety, I rushed to Vellore to consult the famous surgeon at the Christian Mission Hospital, Dr. Somerwell. I requested him to go over and examine Bhagavan; he hesitated thinking that the ashram might not let him, but for my sake, he agreed to be a stand-by while the operation was on. From the description of Bhagavan's condition I gave him, he told me that it was probably too late to do anything. He would however help in whatever way he could. We then returned to the ashram though the hour was late; we met Bhagavan and told Him about the Vellore surgeon's assurance of help. Bhagavan's first reaction was to ask whether I had told the ashram office. I replied I had not but that I would do so at once. From Bhagavan's look I felt that the office would not allow me to bring the Vellore surgeon into the affair. I was indeed told that the doctor then attending on Bhagavan was good enough and that another would not be needed. When I came back and told Bhagavan, He made a sign as if to say—"Don't

worry." Later, friends told me that it was just as well, as else in view of the subsequent developments, the blame could have been laid at my door.

Blood wet cushions

I had made two long cushions for Bhagavan to rest the affected hand on and they were soaked with blood oozing therefrom. Bhagavan on this occasion and in the presence of His attendants Shri Rangaswami and Shri Satyananda, gave me those two cushions as His gift to me. I replaced these two cushions with fresh ones the next day. These cushions I esteem as precious relics and are amongst my prized possessions today.

Bhagavan suffered patiently

Bhagavan bore His pain with exceptional patience. The pain must have been terrible. The doctors could do little to mitigate it. Mouni and a few others prayed to Bhagavan Himself to let them know if anything could be done. Bhagavan said, "Oh, Oh, now you come to ask me. You wanted to do whatever you liked with this body. Now why come and ask?"

There was a background to this self of Bhagavan. Bhagavan had a small wart like growth on His arm which for long none noticed. An attendant one day found that Bhagavan was having high temperature and that the body was burning hot. The doctor sent for noticed this growth. The next day when Bhagavan was in His bath, this doctor and another advised Bhagavan that it was desirable to remove this wart surgically. Bhagavan said, "Leave it alone, it will be all right". Three days this request was repeated and on the third occasion, the *Sarvadhikari* said that the doctors had been at pains to prepare for an operation. Bhagavan had never asked any one for any favour and the reference to the doctors taking pains made Bhagavan change His mind; He was now willing to let the doctors operate on this growth. Retrospectively it seemed as if Bhagavan allowed His body to be crucified. If He had

The Last Illness

been allowed to go His own way, Bhagavan might have cured Himself. Had He not cured me? Had He not cured another lady of cancer of the throat? Could He not cure Himself?

The night before the fourth operation, while the ashram people were at dinner, I went into the New Hall where Satyananda and Rangaswami were massaging Bhagavan's back. With tears in my eyes, I said to Him, "Oh, Bhagavan, do grant me but one request—I have never asked Bhagavan anything for myself. Do transfer this disease to me and live for the sake of mankind. Taleyarkhans are but of little use to mankind. But without you, I cannot live, I would be helpless." Bhagavan said, "Why do you attach so much of importance to this body?" I replied, "Bhagavan has taught me to love it." Then Bhagavan told me: "Where am I going? I am always with you." At this I knelt down crying and placed my head on His knees. Bhagavan touched my head thrice saying these words each time He did. Then He gave me the Kashmiri shawl He had about Him—yet another precious relic of Bhagavan treasured by me.

In my growing anxiety for Bhagavan, I wrote to Maj. Gen. S. L. Bhatia, then Surgeon-General, Madras, to pay an official visit to Tiruvannamalai and see Bhagavan. There was great reluctance on the part of the ashram to let him examine Bhagavan. This perhaps gave him and Major Farrington, his friend, an opportunity to be with Bhagavan for quite some time. Bhagavan asked the ashram doctor to be sent for and when he came, the wound was opened. Gen. Bhatia examined Bhagavan closely and came home with me to lunch without uttering a word. After lunch he told me that the cancer was too far gone and that it was only a question of time before the crisis came. Bhagavan had earlier set His face against amputation of the arm as a desperate remedy.

In view of the growing deterioration in Bhagavan's health, the *Sarvadhikari* was anxious to make arrangements of his own for the management of the ashram. He approached Bhagavan with a request for a will handing over the ashram to his

management. It is difficult to tell whether Bhagavan was angry or indifferent, but He said, "Oh, Oh, once you had it, you then left it. Now you come asking for it again. Nothing doing. Let things take their own course." Turning to me He said, "Do not bother about these things at all, go and have your food."

A Great Soul leaves us

H. H. Maharaja of Bhavnagar who was then the Governor of Madras (he is no more—bless his soul!) wrote to me telling me that he was hearing disturbing news about Bhagavan's illness and that as he had a big tour programme, he would like to know the real condition, so that he could adjust his tour programme accordingly. I informed him to come straight-away to the ashram as one could not be sure of the course of events.

The Governor and the Maharani of Bhavnagar arrived. I took them to Bhagavan. When His Highness saw Bhagavan's swollen forearm, he said to Bhagavan, "This would cause a lot of pain." Very sweetly Bhagavan said, "Just when you say so, otherwise not." Then His Highness said, "Oh, Bhagavan, please cure yourself for the sake of humanity."

Bhagavan with a smile of surpassing sweetness said, "I am 70 now—10 years later too you will say the same thing. When you have eaten your food on a plantain leaf you throw it away—this body is like that leaf, it has to be thrown away after us." The Maharaja and the Maharani were moved to tears. Thus they took their last leave of Bhagavan.

The doctor said that Bhagavan's condition was serious and that there should not be the usual *darshan* at 5 p.m. Bhagavan asked why the curtain was still down and was told it was the doctor's order. "Oh, is that so? Then I shall go out," He said. Immediately the curtain went up, hundreds of the waiting crowd filed past Bhagavan—a most poignant scene. The American "Life" paper man and other photographers were standing by my side. Their eyes were also

filled with tears. At 8 p.m. all the while Bhagavan's favourite peacock and other peacocks stood up in line on the thatched shed near His room, with one stretch as if calling out to their Lord—"Oh, Peeu, Peeu, Peeu." We knew the grave hour had come. It seemed as if Bhagavan was waiting for something. A wonderful meteor like flash appeared on the sky beautifully gliding from West and passed over our houses to the temple of Arunachala and turning from there entered into Ramana's Home—The Arunachala Hill. But Shri Ramana sitting in His *Padmasan* as usual, just closed those beautiful star-like eyes of His.

My Lord's body departs

The world is in the process of disintegrating in its own darkness and confusion, while simultaneously struggling for its own rebirth. It is searching for light amidst a profound global darkness, that only promises a greater gloom in the foreseeable future. *That this is the actual spiritual state of mankind in mass is and has been the opinion of most of the world's intellectual gurus.*

Yet all is not hopeless, light from high on has pierced through the gloom and is sending forth its luminous spiritual radiance around our world, quietly, silently, secretly giving strength to souls to endure. . . all is not in vain, the spiritual light shall manifest itself more and more. . . the world is mysteriously enveloped in the Pure Eternal Consciousness.

From an obscure village, on a very old yet little known mountain, amidst the poverty, disease and suffering of India a beacon of Divine consciousness radiates far and wide, a guiding light shines from Arunachala.

The Divine Consciousness chose to sow the spiritual seed of Ramana Maharshi in these barren rocks, to demonstrate to the world that spiritual Light is not only transcendent of material circumstance, but all Graciousness, and truly loves the humble poor, created by egocentricity and ignorance of mankind.

It is not difficult to see something of the Divine intention

in the coming of Ramana Maharshi to Arunachala. What better place than this for the descent of light and love amongst the humble poor of South India?

Rangaswami, Bhagavan's attendant

Bhagavan had four attendants—Mahadev, who was one of them, was a tall, handsome man and looked like a peacock. Krishnaswami, Shivaswami and Rangaswami were the other three. Mahadev died very early. He was the most devoted attendant and besides, a good book-binder. He was held in deep affection by Bhagavan.

The attendants had always to be alert. Bhagavan would never ask for or order anything—they had been trained in such a way that they knew instinctively what Bhagavan wanted at any time. If He wanted to have drinking water or wanted to wash His hands or wanted books or paper, they would know without being told.

It was Mahadev's duty to give Bhagavan *pansupari* every day after His meal. One day he entirely forgot to give it to Him. Next day when he took it, Bhagavan looked at him and said, "Yesterday you did not give me *pan*—perhaps you thought I didn't need it. I shall not need it at all hereafter. Don't bother to give it to me." Poor Mahadev was in tears but once Bhagavan said it, no one dared attempt to change His mind.

On the 12th April 1950 Rangaswami came to my place at 8 p.m. when Mr. Cohen and I were having our dinner. He brought us bad news. He told us, "Bhagavan will leave us now within three days." That night I was gently rubbing Bhagavan's swollen hand. Then my tears fell on His hand. Seeing that, Bhagavan gently said, "You have worked hard for me. There are no adequate words in Tamil to express my thanks except *Romba Santosham* but in English I can express it saying 'Thank you very much'. This I say to you, in three days you will all be free. You will have no trouble nor work. But then you will have another trouble. There will be the problem of your food, stay and comfort."

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Every word of Bhagavan's prediction came true—Krishnaswami, Shivaswami and Rangaswami were sent out of the ashram. Swami Satyananda who was looking after the *Nirvana* room and the big hall alone stayed back. I was angry that poor Rangaswami, who was ill and wanted to live at the ashram and die there, was not allowed this simple wish of his. He died in his village a few months later. I am sure the ashram did not fulfil its duty of sheltering the attendants who had worked for years and years. I felt it was the duty of the ashram. But I am sure Bhagavan was near Rangaswami to give him His Grace and Protection.

On the 14th April, 1950, Bhagavan's peacocks sat in a line on the top of the thatched verandah of *Nirvana* room—all of them sweetly calling out 'Oh, peeu, peeu, we know our Lord is departing now.' So they knew that my Lord was departing and so it happened. My Lord departed giving us *darshan* till the last. Three days before His departure Bhagavan's attendants Krishnaswami and Anjamalu came to me and requested me to help them in their chalked out programme to remove Bhagavan's body to Arunachala Hill and bury it there. They had already made arrangements with the city people. A big crowd was on their side to help them. I did not agree and warned them to be careful. I told them, "I will not allow you to take such a drastic step". Immediately I called the Police Inspector and also phoned to the Police Superintendent Mr. Devaraj. Luckily some Officer received my message at 11 p.m. and he came to me. Mr. Cohen and I informed him of what had happened. He asked us not to worry and agreed to give every help. He told us that he would ensure that everything passed off peacefully. Next day he came with a detachment of the police force. The whole of the ashram was surrounded by the police under Mr. Devaraj's personal supervision. He managed it so well that no one knew why the police had taken charge.

XII

AFTER MAHASAMADHI

Bhagavan's Personality—The Sacred presence of Bhagavan—Bhagavan's Tolerance—Animals and Birds loved Bhagavan—Internal strife in the Ashram after Mahasamadhi—Reference about myself: "The Mountain Path"—The First Committee of 17 members—Venkataraman, the new Manager—A New Board of Trustees—False report in "The Mountain Path"—The Facts of the Case—Mr. Cech meets with a bad treatment—Mrs. Lucy's Case—Devotees of long standing meet with a similarly bad treatment—Bhagavan's Jayanti on 4-1-69—Venkataraman's former good act—My help to Venkataraman's family—Sundara Raman's admission—Lakshmi's Wedding—Nagalakshmi's Illness—Saraswathi's admission to Medical College—The true meaning of 'Ma'.

Bhagavan's personality

Bhagavan's serenity, poise, humility and consideration for people, whatever their status, was such that even the casual visitor noted it. If in the course of His usual walk He found any one making way for Him, He would immediately ask the other to proceed and Himself follow—such was His courtesy and dignity. Few could notice that He was scantily clad, only in *kaupin*, a 'nagna' as some people, in their ignorance, called Him. I could not help loving Him deeply; I could hardly hold myself back from shouting—"See, there comes my Lover"—whenever I saw Bhagavan stepping along the mountain path towards the ashram in the evening after His usual walk. That my kith and kin should say I had deserted them for a naked *sadhu* was no wonder. The peace generated in His presence was so intense that not all the tension and conflict in the ashram could upset ever so slightly the minds of the devotees. He was a resident of the ashram, but He kept Himself aloof from the affairs of the ashram, which were entirely in the hands of Niranjananda Swami as *Sarvadhikari*.

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He would set visitors an example by observing every rule and regulation laid down by the *Sarvadhikari* so scrupulously as at times to seem disconcerting even to that authority. His love for us, who can hardly call ourselves His devotees, was such that He held us bound to Him with invisible hooks of steel which nothing in the world could break. Where is the Mahatma today to perform the miracles? He did all He did so unobtrusively that one hardly realized it. Yet He never claimed to have performed any miracles. Where is the high-souled one who laid no external restrictions in any matter such as food, fasting and the like and yet could give you a push forward on spiritual path by His mere look? The sunshine of His glorious smile was such as to make one forget all the toil and turmoil, not only of the immediate surroundings but of the world from which the visitor may have come. The experience one had in His presence was impalpable and indescribable. In His presence one felt that everything else except He was *maya* and that He alone was the Truth. Seemingly inactive He could achieve everything. He desired quite effortlessly. He was the epitome of apparent but dynamic inaction, as it is termed in the *Gita*.

The Sacred presence of Bhagavan

I was most fortunate and privileged to have had contacts with such a great soul in my life. It is hard to believe that in an age as ours a leading tower of light such as my Lord Ramana could ever have lived. Who can describe the sweetness of sugar except by tasting it? Who can describe the peace and calm radiating from Bhagavan except by enjoying it oneself? I felt that in the ultimate resort when intellect fails us human beings, we can only resort to prayer and to the company of such Mahatmas in whose presence the mind of man naturally turns to matters of spiritual import and the higher aspects of man. One is enabled to pursue all of one's worldly activities, all the while keeping one's mind constantly on the thought of God. The suffering that one endures is of one's own making.

For our suspicions of each other, our ill-will, hatred and greed, the lasting solution can be had only in the company of such great souls.

Bhagavan's tolerance

Essentially human, knowing and tolerant of all weaknesses of the flesh, He could tell X, a learned bachelor, guilty of one of the heinous sins, even before he approached Him: "Well, it is a human weakness, don't do it again," and permitted him to be with Him in the ashram even when the injunction was disobeyed. Who can be so tolerant of our weaknesses as much as Bhagavan?

Animals and birds loved Bhagavan

Not only men and women, but animals, birds and all creatures with any life in them loved Bhagavan, even as He did these dumb creatures. The Maharaja of Dharampur, at my invitation, had come to the ashram with a large retinue to spend but a day. He stayed on for three weeks on condition that I meet him every day and told him stories of my experiences with Bhagavan which he heard with rapt attention and great love. Dr. Pispati, who heard me, smiled somewhat cynically when I asked him to be at the Old Hall when Bhagavan returned from His usual walk in the morning. He did so and stood at the place where the *samadhi* presently is and saw to his surprise with what regularity two peacocks spread out their tails and danced just as Bhagavan returned. This led him to remark that the birds seemed to love Bhagavan more than we did. He had a photograph taken of the birds then.

Internal strife in the Ashram after Mahasamadhi

Tension there was in the ashram regarding its management, one party being for the *Sarvadhikari* and the other for ousting him altogether. These differences found open and at times violent expression immediately following the *Mahasamadhi*

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of Bhagavan. I was approached by one party not to stand up on the side of the *Sarvadhikari* and they were even prepared to purchase any right or claim he may have for a sum of Rs. 50,000/- which they had ready with them. My love and affection for him and his son was such that I refused and stood shoulder to shoulder with them in all their not inconsiderable tribulations when most of the devotees had made themselves scarce. I am quite clear that this will not be refuted since it is well authenticated by letters in their own hand.

Reference about myself—The Mountain Path

The ashram journal, *The Mountain Path* has this to say of me in its issue of January 1965 on page 64:

"Mrs. Feroza Taleyarkhan is of a prominent Parsi family of Bombay. In the days of British India she moved in the highest society, knowing Maharajahs and Viceroys personally. She had, however, an urge for a more meaningful life and this inclined her to seek out more than one *swami* and *guru*. She met Gandhiji and was strongly drawn to him and his work. The real turning point came, however, when she came to Tiruvannamalai. She was completely overwhelmed by Bhagavan. Withdrawing from the society life she had previously led, she built herself a small house here and settled down. It is a practical illustration of Bhagavan's true catholicity that she never felt any need to change from her Zoroastrian faith to Hinduism and He never urged her to.

"Mrs. Taleyarkhan has always been an active and energetic force in ashram affairs. Especially in the troubled times following Bhagavan's *Mahasamadhi* she was a staunch and loyal defender of the ashram and its President and had much to do with rallying the

support of devotees. Those days are passed now, but the President still finds her loyalty a strong support. She, like Dr. Krishnaswami, was a member of the original Ashram Committee and she is the other of the two members of the present Board of Trustees appointed by the Ashram President.

“It is largely due to her influence that so many Parsis have been drawn to Bhagavan and so many members of former Princely families of India.”

The First Committee of 17 members

Opposition to the *Sarvadhikari* was such that Niranjananda Swami found it would be quite difficult to carry on the work of the ashram founding his rights on the Will of Bhagavan and carrying on as if the ashram were his private property. It was considered wise and prudent to register the ashram as a public institution under the Friendly Societies Act, and form a Committee for its management. The first Committee of 17 members with Niranjananda Swami as Manager-President, (not *Sarvadhikari* any longer) included besides myself and Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami, Shri O. P. Ramaswami Reddiar, Major A.W. Chadwick, Shri A. Devaraja Mudaliar and others with Shri T. P. Ramachandra Iyer as treasurer. The attitude of both Niranjananda Swami and of his son continued unchanged even after the registration of the ashram as a public body. The other members did not find it possible to continue to reside either within the ashram or nearby. A meeting was held in Madras and another committee was formed on which both myself and Dr. Krishnaswami were members but this led to no better results either. Niranjananda Swami passed away early in 1953 and his son Venkataraman became Manager in his turn.

Venkataraman—The new Manager

His attitude to the ashram was and is no better today than his

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father's and the ashram has for all practical purposes continued to be looked upon and treated as his private property. The Committee was merely used as a cloak! There were not a few tragedies and upheavals during this period which included a fire in the Old Hall and other parts of the ashram, leading to the destruction or suppression of some records.

A new Board of Trustees

The Government of Madras—the then Chief Minister Shri Kamaraj and Endowments Minister Shri M. Bhaktavatsalam—was particularly keen that the ashram should be brought within the purview of the Hindu Religious Endowments Act. Several steps were taken by the Endowments Department for the purpose. It was my lot during these years to be in the van of the ashram management, to go about meeting the several officials and ministers of Government to see that the management did not pass under the control of the Endowments Department. Finally a suit was filed by a few of us including the Manager and myself as plaintiffs in the Sub-Court at Vellore to prevent the H. R. E. Board from taking over the control of the management of the ashram as the ashram did not fall within their scope. Although we failed in the Court in the first instance, we succeeded in the High Court, where the judges declared the ashram was a *public trust* and directed the framing of a scheme for its management under Section 92 of the Code of Civil Procedure. It was again my part to meet the Minister in charge of the Religious Endowments, Shri M. Bhaktavatsalam, and for Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami to meet the then Advocate-General, Shri V. K. Tiruvengkatachari to arrive at the terms of a mutually agreed scheme for the management of the ashram which was subsequently made a decree of the Court of the Subordinate Judge at Vellore and brought into force with effect from 1st January 1964, superseding the earlier Committee of Management. Dr. Krishnaswami and I were the first members nominated to the Board of Trustees by the Manager, and Shri K. Srinivasachari and

Shri S. S. V. S. Muthiah Chettiar on behalf of the Government.

Our hope that at least after the formation of the Board of Trustees under the scheme of the Court, there would be a change in the attitude of the Manager Shri Venkataraman and that he would regard himself as only a trustee accountable to the public through the Board of Trustees for the management of the ashram, remained unrealized. One incident illustrates his attitude more than any other. A meeting of the Board was held on 17-10-1965 in the Old Hall. I found some of the office boys spying on the proceedings at the instance of Ganesan, the son of the Manager. Asked to explain his conduct as he burst in on the proceedings himself, Ganesan proceeded to claim that the ashram was their private property bequeathed by their grandfather, and that we, the members of the Board of Trustees, were strangers and trespassers into their realm! He continued to maintain he was right in what he did.

I here recall an experience of mine long prior to 1964 which shows the length to which "the management" was prepared to go to secure for themselves the right to run the ashram without any control by the Committee. I was then at Bangalore and Venkataraman took me by surprise paying me a visit there to ask me to sign some papers saying that it had something to do with some legal matter or other, I now forget what. I refused and Mr. Cohen who was then present agreed with me. Returning to the ashram, and with a view to removing me from the Committee of Management, Venkataraman posted me a notice of meeting of the Committee to be held the same day. This notice was received by me three days later. To my letter exposing the deceit, the reply was that I had ceased to be a member of the Committee having failed to attend a certain number of its meetings. Such procedures are still in vogue with the management and seems now to have been adopted to oust the two Government nominees on the Board of Trustees—Shri K. Srinivasachari and Shri Bhadrachalam Pillai, the latter of whom seemed specially to have been

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insistent on correct accounting of the collections made on the occasion of the *Kumbhabhishekam* of Bhagavan's *samadhi* and on other items, not quite to the liking of the management.

False report in the "Mountain Path"

What has happened as a result was feelings run high between us and the management then. It is a matter of deep sorrow to me that I supported the Manager! I apologise to the friends who told me so earlier that I would regret my decision.

Let me quote from *The Mountain Path*, April 1967, page 162:

"Mrs. F. Taleyarkhan has for some time been in charge of the construction of the *Mantap* over the Shrine of Bhagavan. She has been however suffering from failing health since her recent heart attack and therefore the previous Trust Board at its last meeting relieved her of this onerous task and entrusted it to Shri V. Ganesan, Managing Editor of *The Mountain Path*. (The Ashram President has since received a letter from Mrs. Taleyarkhan, who is not now here, saying that she is in good health. This is especially good news since she suffered a heart attack four months ago and she had been twice to Madras for treatment)."

The facts of the case

This was their version. The facts are: I could not be present at the meeting of the Board of Trustees in view of the serious condition of my aged mother and told both Venkataraman and Dr. Krishnaswami so when they came to ask me. But the Manager kept back the idea of removing me from the meeting. I suffered from heart attack in September 1966 and had recovered from it sufficiently to attend the construction of the *samadhi mantap*. This work was pushed through quietly by me much to the sorrow of Venkataraman who had been spreading the report that it would be done either by his

grandson or great grandson and not before. But with Bhagavan's grace I completed the *samadhi* on 26th December 1967. They were also aware of my plans for a beautiful railing around the *samadhi* and for the celebration of the *kumbhabhishekam* as well. They however could not let me steal their thunder as they continue to consider the ashram their private property—contrary to what they had accepted in 1950 and again in 1963. They did so only because of the thought that that would be a convenient camouflage to retain control of the ashram and get things done their own way. They knew if I was allowed to carry through with my plans for the *kumbhabhishekam*, the function would be such as would last for ever in the memory of the citizens of Tiruvannamalai, even as the opening ceremony of the Patalalinga Temple by Rajaji two decades back was recalled to memory on the occasion of its *kumbhabhishekam* performed on 3rd November 1968. The talk of the town then was that the revered leader Shri Rajaji was again to be present on that occasion too, although the Governor Ujjal Singh and Sardarni Ujjal Singh had been invited for it. The notice about my health in the ashram journal did put me to no inconsiderable expense in postage to assure friends in India and abroad who made enquiries of my health and to tell them that it was a canard circulated to serve the ends of the Manager.

Fully aware of the attitude of Venkataraman towards the ashram, Dr. Krishnaswami and myself on the first Board of Trustees tried hard to frame a set of rules for the conduct of the daily routine of the ashram so that the residents of the ashram could take a leading part in it and lend it a better set-up than was then the case. What we did try to do will be evident from two letters of Dr. Krishnaswami, one to Venkataraman and another to me (vide Appendix). Being in charge of the day to day affairs of the ashram, to which none of us on the Board could pay attention, he opposed all our well-meant efforts. I may say he sabotaged all the ideas and plans we cherished. We had the whole-hearted support of Shri K. Srinivasachari,

advocate of Tiruvannamalai and a nominee of the Government on the Board for these, however.

Mr. Cech meets with a bad treatment

To quote again from *The Mountain Path*, January 1968, page 82, under the caption "PILGRIMS":—

"Two devotees from abroad, who after strenuous efforts over the years have succeeded at last in coming to the Ashram are Mr. Horst Rutkowshi and Mr. Vaclav Cech. Mrs. Lucy Cornelissen, our staunch devotee and German writer, is back again here and will be here for good."

Good news, but let us see the letter dated 19-1-1968 from Shri Ganesanto the second of the above gentlemen.

"Dear Mr. Cech,

Since there is pressure of space, we want you to vacate your room and permit us to put in another visitor from abroad.

You seem to be more interested in visiting and entertaining strangers. You can very well see for yourself some other accommodation more suitable for you either outside the ashram or in the town with the help of the friends that visit you quite often.

If you want time to decide about leaving the ashram, kindly shift to another room, which the office boy will show you, with the help of the servant sent along with the note. Anyhow you may please leave the ashram soon.

Sorry to disturb you; but we are also helpless.

Pranams.

Ganesh."

Comment is needless. This aged gentleman, suddenly thrown out on the streets without help even for removing his baggage came to me almost in tears and stayed with me for about three months before returning to his native country, Czechoslovakia. Dr. T. M. P. Mahadevan had earlier spoken to me with regret at the way the ashram treated this friend from abroad.

Mrs. Lucy's case

Mrs. Lucy Cornelissen was here perhaps for a few weeks and is not now in the ashram. There has been no news of her in *The Mountain Path*! Instances like these need not be elaborated.

If such is the case with visitors from abroad seriously bent on *sadhana*, need anything be said of visitors from India who are sent out without even so much as a 'By your leave'. More complaisant visitors, whether from India or anywhere else, have been known to be accommodated, in some cases, for years.

Devotees of long standing meet with a similarly bad treatment

Similar has been the experience of resident devotees of long standing who have been making regular contributions to the ashram funds since Bhagavan's days, as of ageing devotees. Their one fault was that they could not bring themselves to submit to the ways of the management.

Shri Muruganar and Shri Natananandar are the two, if there be any, who can in the real sense be called either disciples or members of the family of Bhagavan. Readers of the ashram journal know them well. Why is it neither of them can be persuaded to countenance the management or even accept food from the ashram even though they live quite near the ashram and are none too wealthy? Late in 1968, I understand that as a result of the protest of some eminent person, food is being sent from the ashram to Shri Muruganar, although he is very reluctant to accept it and has often declined it too.

Shortly after the *Mahasamadhi* in 1950 a number of devotees met together at the house of one of them in Madras to talk over what they could do to perpetuate the ashram and how best they could help the *Sarvadhikari* in running it. One of the resolutions they passed was that two devotees should be invited to stay at the ashram permanently without payment and without being given any ashram work to do. The ashram journal on p. 82 of the January 1967 issue refers to this resolution thus: "One of these was the Tamil poet Muruganar (introduced in our issue of October 1964) and the other was Viswanathan."

How has this been honoured? Who is there now in the ashram to express with authority the teachings of Bhagavan which are mostly in Tamil? Only two persons are competent and they are Shri Muruganar and Shri Natananandar and we know how they have been treated by the ashram Manager.

Bhagavan's Jayanti on 4-1-1969

The incident on the occasion of the celebration of the *Jayanti* of Bhagavan on 4th January 1969 cannot be gloated over by any devotee of Bhagavan. They would recall how in Bhagavan's life time, a very large number of people would be fed at the ashram, Bhagavan Himself supervising the feeding and sitting down to food in the second or the third batch. When on one occasion the *Sarvadhikari* said that in view of the strict rationing regulations then obtaining, he proposed to offer *kanji* to the poor and feed certain important devotees in the usual manner, Bhagavan said that He too being one among the poor would be satisfied with *kanji*, which made the *Sarvadhikari* give up his plan. After the *Mahasamadhi* the feeding was carried on although the number fed dwindled considerably. But this occasion on 4th January 1969 is hard to beat in the annals of this ashram or of any ashram. A crowd of about three hundred poor may have gathered to take the food that was being doled out. Far from getting the food which they had hardly known in their lives—so poor were they—a

regular lathi charge was made on them. As I was passing out of the gate on my way home in the company of a few friends, I was an eye witness to it.

Why should I concern myself with the ashram affairs at my age and not leave it to the people who are the blood relations of Bhagavan? My answer is that my association with the ashram has been far too close to allow me to take such an attitude. Devotees who are dissatisfied with the management and want to see that the ashram is more in tune with what they have known of the kindness and courtesy of Bhagavan, approach me to get something done in the matter, knowing that I am interested, active, influential and above all, have no axe to grind. But most of all, one reason that weighs with me and which is incontrovertible so far as I am concerned, is this. I am of course welcome anywhere and at any ashram in this country. But such is Bhagavan's hold on me that I can give up this body only in the vicinity of the place where my Bhagavan's sacred remains are. My daily prayer is that Bhagavan who had granted me several of my wishes, would grant me this one too. It would of course please the management if I quit Tiruvannamalai. But I have no intention of complying with their wishes. They tell any one who enquires of me that I am not at Tiruvannamalai but in Bombay. Early in my life the sense of fear was so great in me that I would hardly open a closed door for fear of a lurking brigand. But from Buddha Gaya onwards I have lost that feeling so completely that my kith and kin are surprised at the courage, moral and physical, I exhibit in living alone in the environment I am in.

Venkataraman's former good act

Why did I give such blind support to the management through the years? Perhaps in some former life, Venkataraman was drummer at Kilut Temple who offered a part of his share of the *prasad* to the hungry boy, then completely unknown but later to bloom as Bhagavan Shri Ramana Maharshi. The

After Mahasamadhi

budding *jivanmukta* in His innocence granted him the satisfaction of all his hunger even as he had satisfied the physical hunger of that boy. It seems to have fallen to me as Bhagavan's devotee to stand fast by him.

My help to Venkataraman's family

Apart from any question of management of the ashram, I can confidently assert that at all times of their need, I have been of great help to Venkataraman and to every one of his family.

Out of the countless ones, the few instances enumerated here will show that the family is under a deep debt of gratitude to me—not that I either want or expect them to show any.

Sundara Raman's admission

In 1953 when admission to the Engineering Colleges in the State was quite difficult, I got Sundara Raman, Venkataraman's eldest son, admission to the Engineering College at Karaikudi by speaking to the founder of the college, the late Dr. Alagappa Chettiar. Today Sundara Raman is an assistant Executive Engineer in the Neyveli Lignite Corporation. I wish him good luck.

Lakshmi's Wedding

In 1959 or was it 1960, on the occasion of the wedding of Lakshmi, the eldest daughter, the reluctant Major Chadwick was persuaded by me to join me in addressing letters, jointly and severally, to our friends for help to Venkataraman on the occasion as being the first of such auspicious ones amongst the blood relations of Bhagavan and raised for him about Rs. 12,000 or so! He alone knows the exact amount.

Nagalakshmi's illness

In 1965, Mrs. Nagalakshmi, Venkataraman's wife, was ill and was examined by Dr. Padma Mudholkar (wife of Mr. Justice Mudholkar of the Delhi High Court) then on a visit to me. She told me that an immediate major operation was indicated.

I took Nagalakshmi by bus to Madras where with the help of a dear friend, Dr. A. B. Maricar, Director of Medical Services, Madras, I got her admitted into the Kasturba Gandhi Hospital where the operation was successfully performed. Was her husband at her bedside then? Did her eldest daughter then in Madras care to visit her ailing mother the first three days? I was as usual staying with my friends at Mr. J. H. Tarapore's and would spend the day at her bedside. I saw to it that she got every attention. Assured that she was progressing well I returned to Tiruvannamalai on 16th March to be with my aged mother.

Saraswathi's admission to Medical College

In 1967 after I had ceased to be a member of the Board of Trustees and though the *Samadhi* was ready, I was asked, too late as it turned out, to try to get a seat for Saraswathi, the youngest daughter, in a Medical College. For the publication of the Ramana Pictorial Souvenir on the occasion of the *Kumbhabhishekam* at the ashram, Ganesan asked me to send Rs. 200 'immediately' and be the first to send the amount. I had to be a canvasser for him to secure advertisements for their quarterly journal when it commenced publication.

Bhagavan was the embodiment of all that is noble, true, and good, but His *blood relations* do not seem to know that lust, greed and wrath are the gateways to hell.

What can one do single-handed in the matter? Shri Aurobindo says in his *Savitri*:

"Intervene not in strife too great for thee
The great are strongest when they stand alone."

Bhagavan is the greatest amongst the great and does He need me to see His ashram run on proper lines?

The true meaning of 'Ma'

I assert I bear no malice towards any being, living or dead.

Not for nothing do people address me *Ma*, which means not mother as commonly understood, but means *love for the guru* who teaches divine service, who brings union with God and who is all love. The power of love alone can change the face of the world and of human beings. I know and have seen that in all difficulties, taking refuge in the Divine is the best solution. Although today I cannot bear the same love I once did to Venkataraman whom everyone would point out to me as 'your son' I still love his children, now forbidden to visit me!

Many visitors and friends have told me of the reception accorded to them at other ashrams, Shri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry—Shri Anandashram, Kanhangad—Shri Gurudev Ashram at Vajreshwari, Shri Ma Ananda Mayi's Ashrams at several centres, and Shri Sivananda's Ashram at Rishikesh. Will the day dawn when Shri Ramanashram will top them all?

XIII

DIVINE MOTHER SHRI ANANDA MAYI

My Stay at Mandi—Dr. Sen—My first sight of Shri Ma—The Experience after the first meeting—Ma's second Darshan at Delhi and my Invitation—At Brindavan, Ma's Company—Shri Ma's visit to the South—Reception at Madras—Shri Ma lays the Foundation Stone for Bhagavan's Samadhi—Shri Ma's visit to Madurai and nearabouts—My wonderful experience at Rameswaram—Shri Ma represents Bhagavan—Shri Ma tells me her Story—Shri Swami Ramdas of Trivandrum meets and honours Shri Ma—Shri Ma visits Mother Ramaa Devi in Trivandrum—Shri Ma visits Mysore—The tour of the South comes to a close—Plan to build a hospital in Shri Ma's name at Banaras—I go with my nephew to Dehra Dun to see Shri Ma in June 1967—Shri Ma names me as "Bhagawat Priya"—My Wonderful experience at the Kumbhabhishekam of Bhagavan's Samadhi—My stay at Brindavan for the second time and the birthday present—Shri B. K. Shah, a gem of a person—Music Recital by Shrimati M. S. Subbulakshmi—Music Recitals by Shrimati Jayalakshmi—Shri Ma declares my new title as 'Bhagavan Priya'—I meet Shri Jaidaya! Dalmia—Visitor from France—Shri Ma cures the pain in my backbone—Different types of Japa Malas for different persons.

My stay at Mandi

It was in 1952 or perhaps a little later, when we were feeling desolate without the physical presence of Bhagavan, that Their Highnesses the Maharajah and Maharani of Mandi, with whom my relationship was very close, persuaded me to visit them in their State. Mr. Cohen accompanied me. From Pathankot we motored some 200 miles to Mandi, along a narrow road, on one side of which is the river Jhelum and on the other high mountain. The snow-capped Himalayas were visible to us all along the route. It was a very pleasant journey and we reached beautiful Mandi towards sunset. The palace garden was full of walnut and other fruit trees and the entire atmosphere breathed peace. We were very comfortably

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lodged. We relaxed graciously with the loving kindness of my hosts. But letters from the ashram spoke of the harassment some ashram devotees faced and asked me to return. The Maharani would never entertain such an idea and said that my place was there and not at the ashram. We visited the hill stations of Manali and Kulu and other places except the high Himalayas and were also the guests of the Maharajah of Suket, where we were shown a pond through which it was said, the great Shri Adi Sankaracharya had passed on his way to and from Haridwar. Months thus passed pleasantly. We then thought it was time to return.

Dr. Sen

We came to Delhi and there Mr. Cohen met Dr. Sen. Hearing from him our story, he suggested: "Why not have *darshan* of Shri Ma Ananda Mayi?" Although Dr. Sen was keen that we should meet Shri Ma, I was in no mood to see anyone. I received a trunk call from Bombay calling me to the bedside of my ailing mother. I requested the Maharani of Mandi—who is also a devotee of Bhagavan—to have *darshan* of Shri Ma as advised and although at first she said she would do so only in my company, subsequently agreed to go alone. She told me at Bombay over the trunk telephone that I too must have the *darshan* of Shri Ma and that I would be charmed with Her even as I had been with Bhagavan and asked me to go over to Delhi for that specific purpose.

My first sight of Shri Ma

A little later I had information that Shri Ma was coming to Ahmedabad as the guest of Shri Munshah. My sister and I reached Ahmedabad and went straight to where Shri Ma was, in a tent in the grounds of the residence of Shri Munshah. Shri Ma does not take up residence in the houses of *grihastas*. My sister and I were taken to the big *mantap* where Shri Ma was. On seeing us from a distance, Shri Ma, who was seated at the other end of the pavilion on a divan, sent for us to go

near Her. In the look of loving silence Shri Ma gave us. I felt talk was profane. She made kind enquiries about our health and comfort. Every now and then the look Shri Ma gave me reminded me strongly of Bhagavan. Shri Ma then returned to her tent and Shri Munshah took us along with Her to that tent. A long queue was waiting there for interviews with Mother and as we were standing, Shri Guru Priya Devi—affectionately known as Didi—drew aside a curtain and called me in saying that Mother wanted me. Although I said I would take my turn in the queue, I was sent for again. That day is a very memorable day in my life. Given a seat near Mother's divan, Mother again made many kind enquiries of us and dear Didi told us we were at liberty to put questions to Shri Ma. Long association with Bhagavan did not incline me to put any. My only prayer was, I said, that the holy name of Bhagavan might be with every single breath of mine. That, the holy Mother said, was already there. In order that we may not be in the way of other devotees waiting for Shri Ma's darshan, we took leave and passed some very happy days in the camp of the Divine Mother and in the company of our host and hostess.

The experience after the first meeting

My sister Mehra, an asthmatic, had passed three sleepless nights and when I told Shri Ma, Mother told us not to worry. She said that she would sleep well. She slept so soundly that night that we were greatly excited the morning after. Taking leave of Shri Ma, we left for Bombay.

Ma's second darshan at Delhi and my invitation

A year or so later, while I was at Delhi I heard that Mother was also then there and I went to pay my respects. In the midst of the crowds that surrounded Her, she engulfed me with kindness. I was deeply touched by Her love and affection. On one of these evenings, I dared to ask Shri Ma to pay us a visit at Tiruvannamalai to which She graciously

replied, "If you call me, I will come." Didi who was with us turned round and told me, "Don't you believe it? She will never come. Shri Ma's programmes are notoriously undependable." I took the challenge and put it to Shri Ma: "Please, Ma, do come and let me win the challenge." She agreed to my request and the next day left for Brindavan.

At Brindavan—Ma's company

In the company of the Maharajah and the Maharani of Mandi, Sarojini Huthee Singh and a few other friends, we spent two happy days at Brindavan. When taking leave, Mother called me to a small room where she put on me a geruva coloured cloth that she was having round Her neck and told me that she was dyeing me in that colour!

Shri Ma's visit to the South

At Tiruvannamalai, while immersed in the troubled waters of the ashram affairs a letter from Shri Swami Paramananda informed me that Shri Ma and party were at Puri and intended to tour the South. Dismissing all thought of the ashram from my mind, I hastened to welcome Shri Ma with a party of seventeen at Madras.

Reception at Madras

At Madras we were in a difficulty at first to find suitable accommodation for Shri Ma and Her party in spite of the best efforts Dr. T. M. P. Mahadevan and I made. Shri J. H. Tarapore came to our rescue and offered the palatial residence of 'Abbotsbury' on Mount Road in a prominent part of the city. A beautiful, well-decorated hut was put up for Shri Ma on the grounds of that compound.

The reception committee had on it as members Shri K. Venkataswami Naidu, Minister, Chief Justice Shri P. V. Rajamannar and Dr. T. M. P. Mahadevan, besides several other leading citizens. We received Shri Ma with due pomp and ceremony at the Central Station and at

'Abbotsbury' with *poornakumbham* and when She entered the circular hut that had been put up for Her, She was so delighted with it that She went round it saying 'Gol, Gol'. Gracious Ma went round the whole place as I took Her to show Her a temporary bathroom, which Mr. Tarapore had built for Her behind Her tent. Suddenly, She went in and sat down for a bath; I shouted to Shri Gurupriya Didi to come. She and dear Bhumi came running with hot and cold water for a bath. What do you think, Mother was taking a head bath! Didi dear said it is most unusual. She has never done this before. I stood outside gazing at it all in wonder. Can we ever understand Her mysterious ways? Was it Her grace and blessing for me that She should start Her tour of the South in such a peaceful, joyful way?

His Holiness Shri Hari Baba, Avaduth Baba, Swami Paramananda, Didi and others who had accompanied Shri Ma were comfortably accommodated in the main building. Shri Ma's arrival in the city had been well publicized in Madras and in Bangalore too, through cinema slides in Madras and leaflets dropped from the air both in Madras and Bangalore. Large crowds surged for Shri Ma's darshan at 'Abbotsbury', morning and evening. There were bhajans, music recitals and interviews which filled Shri Ma's day. These however did not interfere with Her sight-seeing trips in and around Madras. She was cordially received at the Theosophical Society and taken around it. At the end of Her stay, Mother left for Pondicherry and I came to Tiruvannamalai to arrange for Her reception there.

Shri Ma lays the foundation stone for Bhagavan's Samadhi

At Tiruvannamalai Mother graciously agreed to the request I had taken the liberty to make—Didi and others of Shri Ma's entourage told me that such requests were never entertained by Shri Ma—that Shri Ma lay the foundation for the construction of the *Samadhi* of Bhagavan. Shri Ma had never before under-

taken such functions. I was very happy to have Shri Ma lay the foundation that day, although the show put up on that occasion was sadly lacking in the grandeur one associates with such functions and was in marked contrast to the reception accorded to the Holy Mother the following day at Shri Arunachaleswarar Temple, where, to the intense delight of Shri Ma, thousands had congregated for Her darshan.

Shri Ma's visit to Madurai and Nearabouts

Going on to Madurai, the next city visited, where a grand reception was accorded to Her, Mother sang *He Bhagavan* to a delighted audience of nearly 25,000 assembled in the Shri Meenakshi Temple, who heard Her in moving silence so that even as Shri Ma left, the people stood up with folded hands and did not attempt to touch Her feet. The people were enchanted with Shri Ma as Shri Ma was with the people and at the conclusion of the visit, she remarked that the city was saturated with *bhakti*. Mother also visited the house in Chokkappa Naicken Street where Bhagavan had lived as a boy and attained illumination; so overwhelmed was Shri Ma that she embraced the photo of Bhagavan there.

Tiruchi, Srirangam, Thanjavur and Tiruchendur were among the other places visited by Shri Ma and Her party. At Tiruchendur, Shri Ma remarked that she had visited the place earlier with Her husband Shri Bholanath and had then slept on some pial but had not visited the temple, which she did on this occasion for the first time.

At Rameswaram—My Wonderful Experience

Rameswaram was the next holy pilgrim centre the party visited. Strange things happened here. Shri Ma showed me who She really was. Arrangements had been made for the temple honours for Shri Ma's reception at the temple. That morning I saw Shri Ma run down the steps of the place we were occupying and hastening towards the temple long earlier than the appointed time; calling to Didi, I followed

Shri Ma, who was running like a young girl of seventeen summers. I saw Shri Ma enter the sanctum sanctorum and at that very moment the frail figure of a lady with *vibhuti* smeared all over the body and carrying a small *trisul* in the hand emerged from that shrine, entered the one opposite and disappeared into it. Then I saw the Divine Mother Shri Ma Ananda Mayi as Shri Parvathi and as Shri Rajeswari. What a sight for the gods! What an unforgettable darshan it was! It was given only to me to enjoy it! Shri Ma came out of the sanctum sanctorum and stood beside the beautiful Nandi in stone in front of the sanctum sanctorum. When I looked at that stone Nandi, what did I see? To my utter astonishment, it was not the stone Nandi I saw but the head of beloved Shri Guru Priya Devi, Didi, and my immediate reaction was that the Lord Siva had sent His own Nandi in the form of Didi to keep watch over and protect His beloved Shri Parvathi, now incarnate as Shri Ma Ananda Mayi. Since then I have addressed Didi as Nandi.

Shri Ma represents Bhagavan

Travelling by train from Tiruchi to Madurai and onwards, a suspicion had entered my mind whether I was right, after my long association with Bhagavan, in associating myself with Shri Ma in the same degree as I had with Bhagavan. I did not give expression to this doubt of mine and had tried to still it. Shri Ma, however, knew it and in Her own way removed that doubt, root and branch, so that it can never rise again. Had any verbal explanation been offered, it would hardly have been as satisfactory as the one I had. Such was—and is—the grace of Shri Ma.

That evening the saints and swamis in Shri Ma's entourage took me to task for taking Shri Ma away without informing them and giving them the opportunity to accompany Shri Ma as they usually did. My explanation was unacceptable to them and I was nonplussed. Shri Ma, who was within hearing,

came out of Her room and told the company that She had an appointment to keep and so had left to keep that appointment. Shri Ma is well-known to be not relied upon to keep any of Her appointments and so the swamis turned round upon Her and told Her: "So, you too keep appointments." Shri Ma replied that this particular one was waiting for Her for over a hundred years. The explanation offered for Shri Ma's inability to keep up with the appointments is that She goes wherever and whenever any devotee thinks of Her intensely and that She cannot avoid going to the rescue of such a devotee and hence other appointments made for Her are not adhered to. Thus was it given to me to realize in an indelible manner the inner unity of saints. There is hardly any difference between Bhagavan and Shri Ma.

Shri Ma tells me Her story

That night at the Rameswaram Temple, Shri Ma and Her entourage greatly enjoyed the ceremony of taking the Lord to His bed chamber. As we were about to retire to bed, noticing the agitation in me over the evening's incident, Mother very kindly took me into Her bed-chamber and kept awake till the small hours of the morning, recounting to me the story of Her life from birth till then, wondering all the while why She found Herself telling me the story. Didi often took us to task for keeping awake but Shri Ma told her to go to bed and not to mind us. How can I account for such confidence save that it was entirely Shri Ma's grace?

Shri Swami Ramdas of Trivandrum meets and honours Shri Ma

Cape Comorin and Trivandrum were the next places on Shri Ma's itinerary. Invited to the palace of Their Highnesses the Maharajah and Maharani of Travancore, Mother greatly enjoyed the beautiful decorations at the palace. Here I learnt that Shri Swami Ramdas and Mother Shri Ramaa Devi were in Trivandrum; and with Mother's permission, I went

to see Shri Swami Ramdas—Papa, as he is lovingly called—whom I have known for a while, having visited him and Mother Krishna Bai at their Anandashram at Kanhangad on the west coast and enjoyed their hospitality. I went to where Papa was with a Judge of the High Court of Travancore. I was welcomed by the surprised Papa, who, on hearing that I was with Shri Ma whom he had not met, willingly agreed to my request to go over with me to visit Shri Ma, postponing certain appointments made for him by his host. I took Papa in the car and Shri Ma was very glad to see him, in the company of the saints and devotees with Her. At Papa's invitation, Shri Ma and Her party attended a meeting Papa addressed that evening where Papa—Swami Ramdas—referred with great delight to his meeting that day with Shri Ma.

Shri Ma Visits Mother Ramaa Devi in Trivandrum

Anxious that Shri Ma should also meet the other saint then present in Trivandrum—Mother Ramaa Devi—I went the next morning to the place where Shri Ramaa Devi was and when I made the request, after some consultations, Shri Ramaa Devi countered to suggest that I bring Shri Ma to her place the next evening, to which course Shri Ma readily agreed. Thereon, thinking that bringing about a meeting of all the three saints in one particular place would greatly delight the devotees, I ran to Shri Swami Ramdas, who readily fell in with my suggestion and agreed to be present at Shri Ramaa Devi's place along with Shri Ma.

Assuring myself of the arrangements for the reception of these two saints at Shri Ramaa Devi's place, we all went there at the appointed time—6 p.m.—and what arrangements had been made! They got off the car at the gate and walked between two rows of geruva-clad girls holding lighted lamps in their hands, wearing flower garlands round their necks, to the tent where Shri Ramaa Devi was seated on a chair. Shri Ma and Papa were seated on one divan and the saints and swamis accompanying Shri Ma on another divan. The

Divine Mother Shri Ananda Mayi

entire place had been tastefully decorated for the occasion and there was a very enjoyable bhajan. Shri Ramaa Devi spoke welcoming Shri Ma and Papa—that was her first meeting with Shri Ma, while Papa she had met earlier. Both Papa and Shri Ma as also their following were highly pleased with the reception accorded to them by Shri Ramaa Devi.

It was a great occasion in my life to have been the instrument to bring about such a meeting of three well-known saints of India, and Shri Hari Baba said it was very rarely that such meetings took place. It was the grace of the saints and my good fortune that made me the instrument for bringing about such a meeting.

Shri Ma visits Mysore—The tour of South comes to a close

Kaladi, Coimbatore, Coonoor and Ooty were on the party's itinerary on our way to Mysore where the Maharajah and the Maharani had erected a lavishly decorated tent for Shri Ma on the palace grounds. The Maharani accompanied Shri Ma to a special and solemn *pūja* conducted on a royal scale at the temple of Shri Chamundeswari. There was a splendid reception at the Town Hall. The visit to Mysore greatly pleased Shri Ma. Shri Ma and her party then left for Poona on the 4th of December. Thus the triumphal tour of South India drew to a close, leaving an indelible impression on the people she had come in contact with.

Plan to build a hospital in Shri Ma's name at Banaras

Later I had to go to Bombay on the receipt of a call from my nephew who had undergone a series of operations for cancer without finding any relief. He had to proceed to the United States for consultation with specialists there. Meeting Didi in Bombay then, I learnt of the plan to build a hospital in Shri Ma's name at Banaras, at a cost of about Rs. 3,00,000/- and offered to do my share in raising funds for the purpose.

I go with my nephew to Dehra Dun to see Shri Ma in June 1967

My nephew who had been to the States was advised that only the amputation of the part affected would prevent the spread of the disease; so he had to return to India since there was none of the family with him there except his wife to whom the strain would be too great in an alien country. I took the opportunity of taking them both for the darshan of Shri Ma then at Dehra Dun. I had written to Shri Ma of our coming and had also told Shri B.K. Shah, a friend and a devotee of Shri Ma, who had gone there a day earlier, that we were going there. On our arrival at Shri Ma's place, we found that lunch was awaiting us. We had regretfully to tell Shri Ma that we had ours before coming in for darshan. Our comforts had been thoughtfully provided for and Shri B.K. Shah had also spoken to Shri Ma. We stayed with Shri Ma for some days and one evening Shri Ma told my nephew who was sitting near Her: "You have given your body for two years to the doctors (none of us had told Mother that my nephew had then been for two years under treatment) and now, why not give it to God?" I believe that it was the grace of Shri Ma that kept my nephew alive in spite of the cruel disease he was suffering from.

Shri Ma names me as Bhagawat Priya

Turning to me, Shri Ma told the people present, "Hereafter Ma Taleyarkhan will be known as *Bhagawat Priya*." I was the recipient of congratulations all round on this singular honour bestowed on me and of Shri Ma's infinite grace to me. That night calling me and Shri B. K. Shah aside, She blessed us in our efforts to raise funds for the hospital.

My wonderful experience about Kumbhabhishekam of Bhagavan's Samadhi

Next morning Chitra—the scientist who had thrown up her work to be with Shri Ma and who is acting as Her secretary and who is dear to me as my own daughter—told me that I

was wanted by Shri Ma in Her bedroom. When I went there I found Shri B.K. Shah already seated with Shri Ma. Immediately on my entering the room, Mother handed to me a white crepe sari and asked me to wear it. Donning the new sari I made my prostrations to Shri Ma. As I did so, Mother asked me: "Do you know what day it is today?" I could not follow what was in Shri Ma's mind and said so. "Do you not remember you wanted to take this body to Arunachala for the *Kumbhabhishekam*?" asked Shri Ma. That was the 18th June 1967. Tears filled my eyes as I remembered my plans to have Shri Ma at Tiruvannamalai to perform the *Kumbhabhishekam* of the *Samadhi* of my Bhagavan. Commanding me to sit down, Mother graciously said: "This body will take you there just now." I sat down and closed my eyes. The wonderful experience is indescribable. I lost sense of the corporeal body and even whether I was breathing or not—so sublime was my state. Some time must have elapsed when I heard Bhayya—Shri B. K. Shah—remark that I must be feeling rather upset. Bringing me back to normal, Shri Ma told me: "*You have been there.*" I felt that the *Kumbhabhishekam* at the ashram was a flop and could bear no resemblance to what I had planned for the occasion.

My stay at Brindavan for the second time and the birthday present

My nephew and his wife returned to Bombay and I stayed on for a while in Delhi and would often visit Brindavan in connection with the plans for raising funds for the hospital. On the 9th of November, 1967 as I was speaking to Shri Ma, telling Her of the difficulties in the way, and Shri Ma was assuring me that all things would shape well, without our knowledge a photographer took a photo of me talking to Shri Ma and sent it to me with a note: "You deserve this". The photo reached me on the 24th of December—my birthday.

Shri B. K. Shah, a gem of a Person

At Brindavan with Mother's blessings we had formed a committee of leading men and women for the purpose of raising funds. It consisted of Their Highnesses The Maharajahs of Tehri-Garwal, of Bhagat, Shri M.L. Khaitan, Shri R.K. Bannerjee, Shri B.K. Shah and others; the Maharajah of Bhagat was the Chairman. Shri B.K. Shah and Mr. S.L. Sopory spared no efforts to make a success of our undertaking and I will be failing in my duty if I do not record here that Bhayya is a gem of a man. We are accustomed to think that people living in ashrams are full of love and the milk of human kindness which is not to be found in the busy work-a-day world. To meet and to know Bhayya—Shri B.K. Shah—as I have, is to know that perhaps such love and kindness can be found more in the busy matter of fact world than within the cloistered walls of an ashram. He is blessed with a noble life-partner, affluent in her own right, who, ever mindful of her housewifely duties, finds time to look after the efficient management of the Nanavati Hospital endowed by her parents at Ville Parle and is as ardent a devotee of Shri Ma's as is her husband.

Music Recital by Shrimati M.S. Subbulakshmi

We had arranged for a musical recital by the famed Shrimati M.S. Subbulakshmi in Bombay—I have mentioned elsewhere how this came about—and this performance was held on December 1, 1967 at the Birla Hall, Bombay. The recital, it is needless to say, was a great success—as it is ever with "M.S.". The funds collected on this occasion exceeded our most sanguine expectations. An excellent souvenir with a number of photos of Mother was brought out to mark the occasion.

Musical Recitals by Shrimati Jayalakshmi

Returning to Tiruvannamalai, I set to work forming a committee for the South Zone for the same purpose, and two musical recitals by *Isaiperisai* Shrimati Salem Jayalakshmi were held, one at Bangalore on February 28, 1968 at the

Rabindra Kalakshetra there, and the other at Madras on April 24, 1968 at the premises of the Music Academy. Shrimati Pathak, wife of Shri G.S. Pathak, Governor of Mysore was the chief guest at Bangalore while Sardar Ujjal Singh, Governor of Madras and Sardarini Ujjal Singh were present at Madras. A very large and distinguished audience graced both the functions and both were a great success not only on the cultural side but on the financial too. The funds raised were beyond our best hopes and the success of these two functions as also the one at Bombay owe in no small measure to the untiring and selfless work of the staff of the New India Insurance Company and its chief, Shri B.K. Shah and its untiring worker Mr. S.L. Sopory.

Shri Ma declares my new title as 'Bhagavan Priya' (on 14-5-1968)

Shri Ma's birthday was to be celebrated on 14th May, 1968 at Banaras and I reached Banaras for the function on the 4th. I found Mrs. Shah—Bhabi as I know her—had left that morning just a little before I reached it, for Bombay to receive her husband returning from England where business had taken him. Early that morning just before leaving to catch the plane that was to take her to Bombay, I heard that as she was preparing tea over a stove, the flame suddenly leapt up and could easily have set her sari on fire with disastrous consequences. But thanks to Shri Ma's grace—it did little more damage than singe just a few hairs on her head. So did Bhayya affirm to me on arrival at Banaras and so did Bhabi tell me when later I met her at Bombay. On Mother's birthday—May 14, 1968—Shri Ma called me and declared in the presence of the people assembled for Her darshan that from that day onwards I would be known as *Bhagavan Priya* and not 'Bhagawat Priya.'

I meet Shri Jaidayal Dalmia

On one occasion of my visit to Brindavan, I noticed amongst the crowd that had assembled for Shri Ma's darshan, one among

them very busy, helping people who had come to have darshan of Shri Ma. I did not then know who he was, but he made an impression on me; I found later that he was great of heart. I was going on foot to the quarters assigned to me, a little further away from where Shri Ma was, when a gentle voice from behind spoke: "Please Ma, why should you walk when there are so many cars about?" and opening the door of one, put me in and had me driven to my residence. His kindly thoughtfulness came forcefully to me and enquiries told me that he was Shri Jaidayal Dalmia, whose charming daughter-in-law, Aruna, I had known much earlier and with whom I was much taken up even when I met her first. We became friends and he asked me if I had seen the birthplace of Lord Shri Krishna that was nearby. He asked his secretary to take me there. I was prepared to see a small temple there but was astounded to see a fine, large temple coming up which on completion may rival the Taj at Agra in magnificence. He did not tell me that he was building the temple, so great was his humility. The story he told me of this temple is interesting. The Moghuls had destroyed the birthplace of the Lord, so they thought, and had built a mosque on the site. But such was the miracle wrought by the Lord that between the birthplace and the mosque there was a wall. He was there to show me round and explain in detail his plans for the temple even as he told me the story. It is likely that the temple will take quite some time to be completed; may the Lord bless him to complete the sacred task he has undertaken. He has been loving and kind to me and what is more than that, prompt in correspondence.

Visitor from France

I may set down here two instances within my particular knowledge of how Shri Ma has helped people who had problems for which they could find no ready or easy solution. To such people my advice usually has been to put the problem to Bhagavan, to go round the hill Arunachala and to pay their

respects to Shri Ma, wherever she might be in North India. Mr. and Mrs. S., a wealthy couple from France were visitors to Shri Ramanashram and Mrs. S. came to me for some light food for her husband. We became friends and she posed to me problems, the solution of which defied their efforts. I gave them letters of introduction to dear Chitra and sent them for the darshan of Mother before whom they laid their problems. In a letter received from her recently, Mrs. S. wrote:

"Tonight I am thinking very strongly about India, Ma Ananda Mayi and you and realise what a blessing I received to be able to go there. I feel much better since the time I visited India. At that time I was intermingled with such problems—they all received their solution, concerning myself and my husband. And I can only be grateful to Ma Ananda Mayi—and to you who have helped me with spiritual authority."

The second relates to a British couple who had come to Ramanashram with several problems on hand. At my instance they went to Madras and there could get reservation by train almost immediately to proceed to Banaras for the darshan of Shri Ma. They then left for Africa from whence they had come. Letters from the wife told me that they had wonderful experience of the grace of Shri Ma and that whenever she entered her prayer room where a photo of Shri Ma is, she felt herself at peace and that Shri Ma is there protecting and guarding her. Many other souls in turmoil have been sent by me to Shri Ma for relief from their pains, mental, physical, material or spiritual.

Shri Ma cures the pain in my backbone

One particular experience of mine is worth recording in this context: I had received intimation of Mother's visit to South India and was making preparations for the reception of the party. I was suffering from pain in my backbone and having in view the heavy work involved in that connection, I hastened

to Vellore to consult Dr. Somerwell, my friend. The thorough examination and X-ray photos taken at the Christian Mission Hospital that day made Dr. Somerwell advise my instant hospitalization for quite some length of time and to warn me that if I did not heed his advice, I might well be a cripple for the rest of my life. I had told him of the projected tour of the saint Shri Ma and the part I had to play therein. He gravely warned me that I would be taking a great risk to engage myself in such a task and even went to the length of warning me that in case I happened to call at the hospital at a future date, I would find its doors locked against me. However, I went to Madras and was with Shri Ma when Mother told me that I must be very tired and should rest. I told Shri Ma about my back. She graciously passed Her hands over my body asking me where the pain was—*idher hai, idher hai*, in Hindi, meaning 'Is it (the pain) here, is it (the pain) here?' Such is Her grace that, that night I slept soundly and did not feel any pain and stood up to the strain of the task I had undertaken in the reception and tour over the South. Neither then nor later did the pain recur, and there was no need for hospitalization.

Different types of Japa Malas for different persons

Shri Ma had given a rosary to an ardent lady devotee of Hers to do *Japa*. Shri Ma has different types of *malas* (string of beads) for different people. One set of beads which would help a person in one condition will not help the same person in a different set of conditions and circumstances. This lady to whom the set of beads was given when her husband was alive, continued to use the same beads after her husband's demise. The third day of the husband's passing, Shri Ma felt that the beads given to this lady ought to be changed and was wondering how and why that thought should occur to Her. Two or three days later a letter from this devotee informed Shri Ma that a monkey had entered the prayer room and had taken away the beads given to her by Shri Ma and

regretting its loss. This occurred just when Shri Ma was thinking of this devotee. Shri Ma had her sent a fresh set of beads suited to her condition then, and informed her that she should use thereafter only that set of beads and asked her to return the earlier set to Her in case it was recovered by the devotee. When this devotee received the fresh set of beads sent by Shri Ma, the monkey returned the old set, which was sent back to Shri Ma. Shri Ma recounted this story to me one night while at Brindavan, and I teased Her saying that while She never acknowledges anything She does, yet She is all the while doing something or other for the benefit of Her devotees. Shri Ma, even as Bhagavan, replied that it was Nature that did all the work and She was not responsible at all.

It is very difficult for ordinary human beings to know the Divine beings. But then some are fortunate to have the grace that they have the intuition to find out and know them. Such was the case of Bhayiji who knew that Gracious Ananda Mayi was not an ordinary being. Yet, at times he would be puzzled. In such a time, he one day asked Shri Ma, "Suppose someone put a burning charcoal fire on you. What would you do?" Shri Ma simply smiled and said nothing. Two or three days passed. Shri Ma suddenly saw a blazing fire burning. She just went and picked up the charcoal and put it on her leg. It burnt the whole round portion of the leg, and Shri Ma let it burn till it was extinguished by itself. She was unmoved and sat as if nothing the matter.

Afterwards the burnt area was very painful and full of puss. Everyone round Shri Ma were upset. Meanwhile, Bhayiji came and saw the leg and was most upset. When he heard the story of what Ma did, his devotion to Ma was so great that he simply bent down and licked up all the puss. Lo and behold! Ma got immediately relieved and the wound started healing rapidly.

Such are their hidden powers. Can the limited intellect of man comprehend their power?

Shri Ma knows about Bobby's death beforehand. My nephew Bobby Capadia passed away on the night of 14/15th February 1969 at 2-20 a.m. in Bombay on the night of the Mahashivaratri. We had not informed Shri Ma of his passing. But we received a letter written at the instance of Shri Ma that on that night and at that very hour Shri Ma felt Bobby was walking towards the feet of Lord Siva and asked us how Bobby was and not to regret if he had dropped the body and Bobby will have no more births. She asked me in particular to pray for Bobby all the while at his bedside and not to grieve over his passing. She knew I loved him dearly — and the shedding his mortal coil, as he would be passing on to regions of eternal happiness only. Such is gracious Shri Ma. This letter is now the prized possession of Dina, Bobby's devoted wife.

Bobby Capadia is no more, gone is a sterling friend, who by his suffering taught us all the fight into the End.

We have mission all of us — to fulfil come what may — Bobby's was to help all those he met along life's way.

Gone is a simple, kindly soul. He fought his battle well; undaunted was his spirit that no cruel pain could quell.

Though times heal the loss we feel, and banish all regret, the memory of this noble man, we can never forget.

The opening ceremony of the hospital at Banaras was performed on December 26, 1968 by the Prime Minister of India, Shrimathi Indira Gandhi. I could not attend that function although I had pressing invitations from Shri Ma, as also from other friends. Subsequent to that function I received a letter from Didi, the text of which is given elsewhere for the interested reader to peruse.

XIV

SPIRITUAL PERSONAGES

Baba Jan—My first meeting with Baba Jan—My second meeting with Baba Jan and her blessings—Baba Jan visited my Home—Baba Sab—Swami Chinmayananda—Ella Dias—Shri Godavari Mata—Shri Harilal Baba—Shri J. Krishnamurti—Shri Mahesh Yogi—Swami Mukhtananda—Ma Pratima Trivedi—Shri Muruganar Swami—Mother Ramaa Devi—Sabar Pak—Shri Satya Sai Baba—Kunu Baba—Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh—Mother Tara Bai—The unknown Sadhu—A Saint from Kailasa—Shri Dada Dilipkumar Roy and Shrimati Indradevi Ma.

Note:—Call it what you will, *prarabdha* or good fortune, it has been given to me in this life to move with people in all levels of life—from the duke to the coterminger. At Bhopal I had to pass for the daughter of the Begum and in that capacity to play hostess to the Prince of Wales, now Duke of Windsor, on the occasion of his visit to that State. At Tiruvannamalai, as one entrusted with the task of completion of the *Samadhi* of Bhagavan, I had to move with the artisans closely. I have thus had contact with people of all strata of society. In the following pages, while attempting to delineate the lines of my life, as I came in contact with several people, I have made no attempt at all to portray the several personalities I met in life, but only to give a factual account of the events of my life as they occurred. Considerations of space have limited the choice of such persons and the selection of these persons too follows no rational basis. However, I have tried to keep one principle in making such choice—to choose such of them as have anything to do with the saints, Shri Ramana Maharshi and Shri Ma Ananda Mayi. There are perhaps personages who had nothing to do with either of them, whom too I have included, may be, perhaps for the interest it may invoke in the reader or for the love I bear them. Needless to say the list is hardly exhaustive and I must apologise to the many whom I have necessarily had to omit for reason only of space and trust they will overlook it on my part in good spirit.

Baba Jan

Even from my early years I had been meeting and associating with sadhus and as I grew older had felt a strange restlessness with the life I was leading. In 1923 I was with my husband

in Poona, engaged in the production of the film *Toll of Destiny* wherein I played the part of a goddess, and destiny then lead me to meet the renowned lady saint, Baba Jan, who had much to do, as many readers may know, in shaping the life of Shri Mehr Baba. We were in the first floor of the house, the ground floor of which was occupied by the wealthy Khoja, Mr. Currimbhoy and his family. One day they had asked me to tea with them and then started telling me of this saint Baba Jan.

I had heard of this saint in Bombay when I was about 14 years of age. She used to stay in Mahalakshmi, under the shade of a palm tree in all sorts of weather, sun or rain, never affected by these. Many people, foreigners among them, would gather and speak all languages, English, French, etc. I had heard a number of stories of this saint then. No one knew anything of her birth, parentage or age. My friends, the Currimbhoys, asked me to meet this saint, but as I was busy with my work on the film and also as I was not quite inclined to go out and meet people, I did not readily fall in with their idea.

My first meeting with Baba Jan

As I was standing on the balcony of our residence one afternoon, and was surprised to see a tonga drive into the compound, the people downstairs shouted to me to come down as the saint Baba Jan had come in the tonga. I ran taking with me some fruits; Sohrab also accompanied me. The saint looked at me with a smile, as I plucked one plantain out of the bunch and offered it to her. She took one half and gave the other half to me. She asked Sohrab, my son, to look after his mother and be faithful to her. Looking in a peculiar way at me she told me: "O, Piare (dearest), now time has come for you to change your life. You will not be what you are now. A great change, great change is coming over you." Dumbfounded, I could not bring myself to ask her what, when and how the change would come about.

She never took her eyes off me and one of her devotees, a Khoja gentleman, told me that I was lucky that the saint was so gracious to me. I did not know what he meant. For two or three days after that meeting I moved about as though I was not myself but somebody else and things looked to me as if someone else and not I were looking at them. Thereafter I became my normal self. We returned to Bombay finishing our film, and a year later I was back in Poona when I stayed with my parents and my two younger sisters also joined me there. One of them was unhappy, having had to part from her husband, leaving her three children with him; she had not seen her children for quite some time and was miserable over it and would shed tears.

My second meeting with Baba Jan and her blessings

The thought of Baba Jan came to me suddenly one afternoon and I asked my sisters to go with me to this saint. We went to where Baba Jan was in a little hut under a big tree. She was seated in a small pram. Seeing me she shouted: "Oh, so you have come." I ran up and stood near her. Suddenly, as though a large reservoir in me burst, I broke into a flood of tears and Baba Jan too started crying. At the same time she was consoling me not to cry and that we would meet again. When I asked her where, she told me that it would be near the sand and a big mountain. Suddenly she pulled some of the white hair on her head and gave them to me along with some flowers lying about her, saying that she would be with me whenever I looked at them. I remember putting this gift in a kerchief, but missed them on reaching home and to this day cannot make out how I came to lose this precious packet. I requested Baba Jan to come in our car for a drive and repeated my request several times but she was declining it every time until an Irani lady who was attending on her told her: "O Baba, they are begging you. Why don't you make them happy?" She relented and agreed to the drive, much to my delight. She sat between me and my

younger sister while the youngest sat at her feet as we went for the drive. As was customary whenever Baba Jan went out, all the Irani folk came out and offered her tea which she would share with us. We had any amount of tea during that drive. Passing a famous fort in Poona in the course of the drive, Baba Jan pointed it out to me and said: "Look, dear, here Shivaji and I used to play as children." I was questioning her about it when her attendant, sitting in the front seat of the car, told me never to question Baba Jan, as I knew little of her.

Baba Jan visited my home

I felt an urge to take Baba Jan home with us, as my father was then for quite a long time engaged in some legal proceedings over some ancestral properties. She came to our house and blessed my father and told him not to worry. My father felt relieved and later he was extremely happy having won the case. To my sister she said that she would be seeing her children within three days and so she did. My life too changed and took a serious turn. I lost my interest in the life of pomp and leisure as also in ballroom dancing, which I was the first in my community to take to and which gave the members of my community an opportunity to spread scandal about me. I had no occasion to meet this saint later and when I came to Tiruvannamalai, I felt that this must be the place where Baba Jan had said that we would meet again.

Baba Sab

I was perhaps about seven years of age when we were on a visit to my father's uncle, Nawab Framroz Jung, Subedar of Gulbarga. A number of sadhus were on a visit to the Subedar. One among them, Baba Sab, tall, fair and clad in geruva clothes, called me and talked to me kindly and asked me to lunch with him the day he came there. On the days following when he was at *sadhana* sitting in meditation with eyes open, sometimes for several hours, I was permitted and indeed

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asked, to be at his side while none else was allowed to disturb him. After *sadhana* he would take me on his lap, pass his hands over me, and talking kindly would ask me what I intended to do in life. He stayed for about a month and before leaving, he told me he was going to the Himalayas and would speak to my parents and take me along with him to be educated in a different and far better way than at any school. My parents were a bit afraid and would not hear of it and so his plans for me did not bear any fruit. I mention this to show that it seems to have been my destiny all this life to be associated with sages and saints.

Swami Chinmayananda

Some years ago, Swami Chinmayananda with a large party of over a hundred of his followers, paid a visit to Tiruvannamalai, when I met him, not for the first time, of course. He camped at the Sathanur Guest House and the party was entertained to dinner at the ashram, after which, sitting under the shade of a tree in the ashram grounds, he gave a discourse on Bhagavan. He spoke with such warmth and love and reverence for Bhagavan as would make any of the so-called devotees of Bhagavan hang their heads in shame that they too could call themselves devotees. Shri Swami Chinmayananda, I felt, must indeed have been blessed by the goddess of learning, Devi Saraswathi, to speak extempore with such feeling and as eloquently as he did. I have noticed also that his followers have been asked to recite Bhagavan's unique poem in which all Bhagavan's 'philosophy' has been crystallized in thirty short Sanskrit couplets under the title *Upadesa Saram* and when they sang these verses in unison, I have wondered at the disciplined, harmonious way in which they sang these beautiful verses. It made me feel that the ashram has a great lesson to learn from Swamiji in many respects. He is, as now India and all the world too knows, a highly cultured and well-educated Swami who has charmed cultured audiences with his disquisitions on the Gita and the

Upanishads and has instilled the fundamentals of Hindu Religion and philosophy in the minds of his audiences in India and elsewhere. He insists that his followers should devote some time to *sadhana* and should not be content with the mere theoretical appreciation of the tenets of Vedanta. At Bombay I had occasion to meet him and was surprised the next day to see him call at my residence and telling me that that was the only way in which he could make me visit his ashram in Powai near Bombay. He then took me along with him. I was greatly charmed to see the fine gardens, the beautiful buildings, and the excellent arrangements made for the reception and comforts of visitors, Indian and foreign, as also for students who were being trained to become monks for the propagation of Vedanta. His ambitious and noble schemes on these lines appealed to me very greatly. He took me to the meeting hall and introduced me to the audience and asked them to join him in telling me that I should, after the hard work I had put in at Shri Ramanashram, go over and stay with them at his ashram. There I met his treasurer, a gentleman of high status, and Swamiji told me that all his (Swamiji's) work was just to give directions of what has to be done and how. It was then the treasurer's headache to carry them out. He said that he did not worry about the financial side of his work, and desired to be free like a bird to come and go as he pleased without being burdened too much with the material day-to-day cares of the world. The great love he has for his devotees and visitors and the care he bestows on any work he has in hand, all brought forcefully to my mind how much could be achieved for Ramanashram if only we had men of such vision to care for it. With all love, I wish him a long life to carry on his noble work—so badly needed in these times when greed, malice and ingratitude seem to rule man.

Ella Dias

Some time after Bhagavan's *Mahasamadhi*, I was at Bangalore.

There I met Miss Mason, an Australian lady, whom I got to know at Tiruvannamalai at the instance of our common friend, the late Duncan Greenless. In the course of our talks she told me of one Ella Dias, a lady living in Bangalore, in whose presence she felt herself completely at peace and offered to take me to the residence of that lady in Rolon Villa, Sydney Park. When we went there, Miss Mason introduced me to Ella Dias as a friend of hers to which the immediate response was: "Yes, I know her. She is Lord Jesus's devotee." She took hold of both my hands and for a long time watched me in silence. Near her bed on a beautiful altar were the statues of Virgin Mary and of Jesus Christ. She told me that she was a cripple who could not get out of her bed and that at one time the doctors greatly despaired of her. But the Lord appeared to her in a vision and told her: "Now you are cured. But you will be bed-ridden. Though bed-ridden, you will be helping many suffering souls and be able to cure them." The vision then vanished. Although then not suffering from any pain, she was confined to the bed which was pure white and beautiful. She told me that the altar near her was her church and every Sunday Mass would be held there, that people resorted to the place for cures and that she was but an instrument in the hands of the Lord. A young girl just then got us two small glasses of wine on a beautiful tray which the lady asked us to drink. At first I politely declined saying that I did not drink wine. She smilingly replied that it was not the usual wine but one made specially of ginger and was given by her to everyone as it helped them be rid of their stomach ailments. Miss Mason also testified to the good effect that it had on stomach disorders and tasting the same I found it was very pleasant and quite different from other wines. I have paid several visits to this lady in company with my friend Miss Mason and have tasted this wine with good results. On one such visit I was tempted to ask for the recipe and was told she would give it the next day as it would give me cause to pay her another visit. I got

the recipe and can say that I have made it at home myself and given it to my friends with good results. Friends of mine in Bangalore have told me that this lady, herself an invalid confined to bed, has effected some remarkable cures, some of which have been miraculous indeed.

Shri Godavari Mata

I have heard of both Shri Sai Baba and of Shri Upasani Baba, and what I had read of them impressed me greatly enough to wish that some day it might be my good fortune to pay a visit to their ashrams. As I was returning on one occasion from Bombay to Tiruvannamalai, I met in the train an attractive girl, Nalini. Her parents who were with her in the train, told me that she was a devotee of Shri Godavari Mata and was staying at Sakori. That was how I first came to hear of Shri Godavari Mata. Nalini asked me to visit Sakori and said that she would inform Mother and arrange for my stay there. I could only tell her then that I would leave everything to my Bhagavan to arrange as He thought best.

Some time thereafter, Shri Swami Rajeswarananda, who was residing in Shri Ramanashram, sent me a note to say that Shri Godavari Mata, then in Cochin, would like to visit our ashram too. I could not persuade the ashram Manager Venkataraman to invite Shri Godavari Mata although I impressed on him her greatness. So I took it on my own to send the invitation by telegram and proceeded to make the necessary arrangements for the reception. Her advance party consisting of some well educated and highly cultured people came and discussed with me the arrangements for their food and lodgings. The next day—on 16th November 1963—Shri Godavari Mata came late in the evening from Coimbatore. We all welcomed Mataji as she alighted from her car—a tall, slim, beautiful lady with a charming smile on her lips and eyes full of love. I felt that I was in the presence of the Goddess of Learning, Saraswathi. The next morning she paid a visit to Shri Ramanashram and in the afternoon

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went to Shri Arunachaleswarar Temple where she was received with due temple honours. The party also went round the sacred hill and Mataji greatly liked the peace and calm of the place and expressed a desire to come again. Before leaving Tiruvannamalai, she made a handsome donation to the ashram.

I was ill in 1964 and had been to Bombay for about three months when Shri Godavari Mata was also there. I saw her several times while she was in Bombay and she invited me to come to Sakori for the *Guru Puja*. I was rather diffident in view of my indifferent health, but my nephew Bobby and his wife Dina, who are both spiritually inclined, took me along with them by car on the 23rd of July, and on our way we spent a short time at Shirdi, the place sanctified by the presence of Shri Sai Baba and where now his *samadhi* is. We reached Sakori that afternoon and as soon as we got out of the car a gentleman came forward to ask if I was Mrs. Taleyarkhan, as though I was expected, and desired to take me to the quarters allotted to us. But I wanted to see Mataji first and I persisted in that desire although I was told that she was rather busy. Just then whom should I see but the gracious Mataji quietly gliding out of a door to greet us and enquire about the arrangements for our comfort. Our host there was Shri Bharucha, a one time high Government official, who later fell under the spell of Shri Upasani Baba and of Shri Godavari Mata. Going round the ashram, we saw the life-like statue of Shri Upasani Baba artistically decked with flowers and the statue of Kanya Kumari adorned with costly jewellery. My fears for the safety of the jewellery adorning that statue were allayed by the residents who assured me that there was no fear of loss or of theft. The chanting of Vedic hymns by the dedicated, beautiful *kanyas*, all clad in saffron-coloured saris, made a deep and unforgettable impression on our minds. Mataji's command over the entire organisation and marvellous grip of all details was founded on the power of her love and gentle speech. That day we took leave of Mataji, but she was reluc-

tant to let us go. After taking leave we stood at a distance to watch the *Guru Puja*. Mataji was seated on an artistically decorated swing with the photo of Shri Upasani Baba with her. The *kanyas* were worshipping her with great love and devotion. It was a very moving sight. Mataji was distributing *prasad* to all the *kanyas* in her own gracious manner. Just as we were about to leave the scene, Mataji sent for me and Dina and when we approached her, she gave us both fruits and flowers and blessed Dina placing her hand on her head. Dina was thrilled and tears filled her eyes. Mataji also sent for Bobby, my nephew who was packing our things in our room, and gave him *prasad* and blessed him. I was then conscious that the grace of her guru, Shri Upasani Baba was manifesting itself through Mataji. As I left the place, I felt how great had been her kindness to us in according us such a reception and felt quite distressed at the poor reception we had given her at Tiruvannamalai. Shri Godavari Mata is all love and kindness and she manages the large institution with skill and grace.

Shri Harilal Baba

When I was performing my *tapas* at Buddha Gaya, I used to go frequently to Sarnath and stay there for periods of about a fortnight. Mr. Jain, who was in charge there, told me one day the wonderful story of Shri Harilal Baba. As a little boy wandering about, Harilal came upon a sage who was doing *tapas*, standing on one leg and with one arm uplifted. Staring at him, little Harilal asked him how he managed for his food and other needs. The sage replied that God provided him and that he took food when it was provided, and otherwise did without it. Feeling pity for him, the little boy thereafter began to bring him food daily and serve him. This he did for some years so faithfully that the sage effected the transformation in Harilal and freed him from worldly attachments. Harilal asked the sage about *sadhana* and was told to look at the sun from sunrise to sunset, to

worship the Ganga and to be in the Ganga. Some time later, on the passing away of this sage, the boy took to the prescribed *sadhana*, and continued it, I do not know for how long. Some one got him a boat to enable him be in the Ganga for his *sadhana*. The great Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviyaji was a devotee of Shri Harilal. This story so interested me that one evening Mr. Jain and I went to the river to see him with flower-offerings, but I was just a little late. His boat was about to leave the river bank for Kasi where he would be for the night and return the next morning to Banaras. However, I ran up and taking hold of his hands, put the jasmine flowers I was carrying on his wrist and said: "O, Baba, I want to see you, but you are going away." He laughed and asked me to come the next day at 3 o'clock. What a wonderful sight it was when we went the next day! He was seated almost naked on a divan in the middle of a big boat. His skin was dark like charcoal and he had white hair formed like ringlets and a beard. Seated around him were two or three hundred sadhus, reciting the Ramayana. I was told that this recitation went on from morning till night non-stop, with five people taking turns at a time. Behind him was his attendant, a handsome young boy, about 20 or 25 years of age. As usual with me, I wanted to touch Baba and hold both his knees but the people around him shouted that I should not do so. Without heeding their warning, I touched his feet and sat at his feet near his divan, almost touching him, when to my great surprise, I noted that he was totally blind. Shocked, I asked: "O, Baba, what is this *tapas* that has made you blind?" He just laughed and said he was not blind. "Can you see me?" I asked but he only laughed and did not reply. Then I told him of my *tapas* at Buddha Gaya, and all the rest of my story, and that I had come seeking his blessings that I might be deep in my devotion and be detached from the world in such a way that only the feet of God and nothing else mattered for me. I also asked for similar blessings for my only son Sohrab who was not with me then, but I told him I would get him along with

me some day. Suddenly Baba said that my son Sohrab was there. I thought that he being blind might have mistaken Mr. Jain for my son, but Baba again said that Sohrab was there. One among the sadhus there told me in English not to argue with Baba but just listen to what he had to say. I replied in Hindi so that Baba might know that he was not right if he thought Sohrab was there. Just then I saw the purse I was having in my hand open, revealing a photo of Sohrab. I was truly amazed and told Baba that he had got Sohrab out and laid my head at Baba's feet. He immediately gave me some of the flowers thrown over him by his chelas. When I enquired about the arrangements for feeding the company, his attendant told me the thought of food never troubled them, that some good man offers some money and one of them purchases] the foodstuffs which they cook and partake. That day I offered them some money for their *bhiksha*. When I took leave of him, Baba asked me sweetly to come again and again. And so it became my habit that every year after the period of *tapas* at Buddha Gaya, I would go to Sarnath and Banaras. Shri Ma Ananda Mayi was then in Banaras, but not having heard of Her I had no occasion to meet Her; perhaps such a meeting was not to be then. Had I met Her then, it is quite likely I might have stayed on with her and not come to Shri Ramana Maharshi at all.

Shri J. Krishnamurti

I was in Bangalore in 1922 or thereabouts, when Sohrab, who had been rather ill, was advised change of climate and told to be taken to Bangalore. His Highness the Maharaja of Mysore and the Yuvaraja were my great friends and I would be invited to all the functions at the Palace. At one of these functions some one told me that Shri J. Krishnamurti, who had been hailed as a Messiah by Dr. Besant, was to speak that day in Bangalore. I had heard Dr. Besant speak in Bombay and was greatly interested in the Messiah of whom

she had spoken there for quite a while. Accompanied by my brother-in-law, we went to the place where Krishnamurti was to speak, which was an open mantap. We were taken to the front row and seated. I saw a very handsome youth speak and was told he was J. Krishnamurti. To my bewilderment he said we were all God. I was a bit shocked, for my idea of God was then quite different. How could we be God with our anger, insincerity and petty jealousies? God is all Love and kindness. His charming personality attracted me. I asked my brother-in-law to get a nice garland—Bangalore is famous for its flowers—and he got a fine one indeed. At the close of his speech, I ran out and held the door of the car open for him to enter and as he approached, greeted him: "Hullo, God, this is to God from me," and garlanded him. He made enquiries of me and invited me the next morning to discuss the question that we were all of us God. I told Krishnamurti that I had little brains to understand the proposition that we are God and invited him to tea at my place. He told me very many interesting stories and we became great friends. I took him to a party at the palace after informing the Yuvarajah. Krishnamurti was taken round the palace gardens and then to the first floor where the Resident and several senior military officers were introduced to him by me. Krishnamurti was then a comparative stranger in India and few, if any, knew him. We met several times at Bangalore without even once discussing the problem of us all being God. He left for Ooty and he asked me to go over to Ooty, but I had to return to Bombay. On receipt of his letter telling me that he was coming to Bombay I went to meet him at the station. There were quite a number of persons waiting to receive Krishnamurti at the station, among whom were several friends of mine. They were surprised to see me there as I was not a theosophist. I had to tell them that Krishnamurti was my friend. Getting down from the train, Krishnamurti came almost straight to me and spoke very lovingly to me. During the period of his stay in Bombay, I used to have

tea with him almost every day. He took me with him to one of his talks. He would intimate me of his visit to Bombay and to India and I used to meet him regularly. After I came to Ramanashram, there was little occasion for us to meet except once. I was with a very distinguished friend of mine, D.K.R., then, but Krishnamurti could hardly recall me and could only vaguely say: "Have we met before?" In view of our friendship, his forgetfulness was a puzzle to me and I did not care to remind him. It was then strongly borne on me that Bhagavan never forgot one He had seen, whatever period of time might have lapsed since the last meeting.

Shri Mahesh Yogi

Unhappy with the way the affairs of the ashram were being managed after the passing of the *Sarvadhikari*, I had left for Bangalore and was staying at the beautiful residence of the dear Maharani of Mandi, some time in 1954. I was quite comfortable there, when Mr. Cohen, a devotee of Bhagavan, asked me to go to Madanapalle where he was, being like me dissatisfied with the state of affairs at Ramanashram. I enjoyed the stay at Madanapalle, a quiet and beautiful place where the Theosophical College is. I asked Mr. Cohen to go to Bangalore with me where I could make him comfortable at my friend's place. A good friend of Mr. Cohen, the owner of a restaurant in Madanapalle, asked us to lunch one day before we left for Bangalore. A gentleman dressed in a long white robe in company with another gentleman and a lady who obviously belonged to Bengal were seated at a table just opposite to ours. This gentleman enquired of the proprietor of me and wanted to be introduced to me. He came to our table and after the introduction, I told him we were going away to Bangalore. He said it was a pity that we had not met earlier and then I asked him if we could not meet at Bangalore. He called on me at Bangalore shortly after and told me his story and of his disappointments at his ashram. I too told him of my disappointments at my ashram and my regret that work

on the construction of Bhagavan's *samadhi* had not even been taken on hand. When told of the requirement of Rs. 1,50,000 for the construction of the *samadhi*, he asked me to go with him to the continent and assured me that a sum of Rs. 5,00,000 could easily be raised there. He urged me rather strongly, as he little knew that I had already been on a few trips round the world and had known some of the multi-millionaires not only in Europe but in the United States as well. I was not therefore agreeable to fall in line with his proposition. On the contrary I asked him to come to Ramanashram, and be my guest. In those days I used to call him just Swamiji. We became good friends and he left for Calcutta. I had no news of him thereafter. Years later I heard the name Shri Mahesh Yogi talked about. I did not know who he was till I was shown a picture of his in some newspaper when I recognised him for the Swamiji I had met at Madanapalle and later in Bangalore. When in February or March 1968 a friend of mine who had met him in his ashram at Rishikesh mentioned my name, he seems to have spoken warmly of me and wrote to me a short note to say that I was always in his heart and that he would meet me in the course of his tour of the South. It speaks of his innate greatness that after the lapse of years and in spite of the fame and wealth that had come to him, he still treasured the friendship of earlier days.

Swami Mukhtananda

While at Bombay, I was asked to meet Shri Mukhtananda of Vajreshwari by a friend who had kindly arranged for the visit. On reaching Shri Guru Dev Ashram where he stayed, I was overwhelmed with the reception accorded to me as also the arrangements for the reception and comfort of visitors to the ashram whether from India or abroad. We spent a day there. The ashram, then in the nascent stage, had two or three lovely and comfortable cottages for visitors, set in the midst of a beautiful and restful garden. Big pineapples and fine mangoes were grown in the ashram and I understand

that the Swamiji himself evinces a deep interest in gardening and had these fruit trees cultivated there. His love overpowered me and as I was leaving the ashram, I requested him to pay me a visit at Tiruvannamalai and be given an opportunity to serve him. He smiled and said, 'We will see.' I insisted on his coming and made him give me a promise to the effect. One fine day I received intimation from Ma Pratima Trivedi — she is the life and soul of that ashram and prior to joining that ashram had been a professor in a college — that Swamiji and his party would be reaching Tiruvannamalai on a certain date. They were lodged in the Khanna and Morvi Guest House and some members of the party were accommodated in the ashram. During his stay of two or three days, he was taken to the temple and many devotees came for his darshan and *satsanga* and had lively conversations with him which helped them clear their doubts.

Ma Pratima Trivedi

A word about Shri Pratima Trivedi will not be out of place here. Meeting the Swamiji while yet in the teaching profession, she felt the urge to give up that way of life and become an ashramite. Her qualities of spirituality, education and culture all combined to make her an ideal Mother of that ashram, radiating peace and love.

In 1968 when I was again in Bombay in connection with the illness of my nephew, I had occasion to go to Vajreshwari with a party of friends numbering about twenty and thought to take the Swamiji by surprise. We were taken to the newly built kitchen fitted with all modern amenities and which the Swamiji himself was supervising. It struck me that the Swamiji must be a great artist to build such a perfect dining hall set amidst sylvan surroundings — to radiate and infuse peace for which alone ashrams are intended and which purpose ashrams must subserve. The Swamiji, to the great joy of a few among my friends, easily cleared the doubts that they had expressed to him in the course of the conversation. He

directed us to visit the *samadhi* of his guru, Swami Nityananda which was nearby. *Puja* and *archana* were performed at the *samadhi* which was well maintained to afford scope for meditation or for bhajan being conducted there. Three hot springs adjoin this place and a few of us bathed there. On our return to the ashram of the Swamiji, we were taken to the dining hall for lunch and met a number of devotees — among them a few from abroad — who were residing there for a long time in pursuit of their *sadhana*. An excellent lunch was served under the personal supervision of the Swamiji. The cottages, now greater in number than on my earlier visit, provided us a very convenient place for rest. In the afternoon we found the Swamiji busy attending to the correspondence and giving directions for the replies. In the evening we left for Bombay, reluctant to leave that haven of calm and peace, not far from the hustle and bustle that is Bombay. Swamiji asked me to come and settle down at that ashram. To the friends who asked him if they could come there for peace and rest, the Swamiji replied that all friends of Ma — meaning me — were welcome any time as the ashram was theirs as much as it was his. I commend a visit to the Swamiji and his ashram by all seekers of peace and joy — for the Swamiji radiates a peaceful atmosphere in his ashram.

Shri Muruganar Swami

Shri Muruganar Swami is a great devotee of Bhagavan and a highly evolved soul for whom Bhagavan had some special affection. He is a great poet and has written several marvellous poems in Tamil, in which Bhagavan evinced great interest. It happened one day that he brought with him some of his writings to show them to Bhagavan. He saw that this work was a very beautiful piece. He made some enquiries of Shri Muruganar and passed on the work to the office for getting it printed. The work came back to Bhagavan with the intimation that there was no money in the office to print it. Bhagavan remarked rather loudly: "Oh,

there is no money. What can we do? Let it be." I knew that the office had no friendly feelings for Shri Muruganar and on the impulse of the moment offered to get it printed at my cost. Going home, I fetched the sum of Rs. 400 which I was told was the amount needed. Bhagavan directed the amount to be given to the office and to get the work printed. Bhagavan then began to speak with such gestures as made us all feel that Bhagavan was either upset or angry. From what had happened I understood that He saw that people lack sincerity and honesty and were not grateful and expected all benefits only for themselves, without any idea of helping others. I was rather uncomfortable as I could not follow what Bhagavan was saying, as I did not know Tamil, and enquired of one or two people what it was that Bhagavan was saying, and whether He was angry with me. The attendant assured me that Bhagavan appreciated my action, but that the remarks were for the benefit of the office, which relieved me very much.

In the last days of Bhagavan's life in the body, when we humans had given up hope and felt that only Bhagavan could cure Himself for our sake, Muruganar approached Him with a poem in Tamil which was so much appreciated by Bhagavan that he directed it to be translated for my benefit. The gist of the poem was:—"He, Muruganar, had not asked any boon of Bhagavan until then, but was tempted to ask of Him once then and that was that Bhagavan should cure Himself." With His hand on His cheek, Bhagavan looked magnificent and gracious like Paramasiva Himself that all of us in the Hall were moved to tears when the poem was read out.

It is a matter of great joy to me that Shri Muruganar is still with us to guide us to salvation along the path shown by Bhagavan. His intense devotion to Bhagavan draws many a devotee to him. They find solace, comfort and peace in His presence, although He resides outside the ashram.

One incident, small in itself, but characteristic of Shri Muruganar, may be recorded here. Bhagavan had as usual gone up the hill and we were on the open ground near the

Old Hall. I was seated on some stone steps and he was walking about. It struck me that I must ask of Muruganar a boon — to cure me of forgetfulness, which was a bit of a handicap to me. I called to him and asked him to bless me, placing his hand on my head. Far from complying with my request as I had expected, he told me, "Are we not here only to forget? You are really blessed. Why do you want to be cured of something which is just what we are here for?"

Shri Muruganar's commentary in Tamil on Bhagavan's *Akshara Mana Malai* — the Marital Garland of 108 verses to Arunachala — was in print and the ashram was desirous of having Shri Natananandar's foreword for the same. Shri Natananandar returned to the ashram just about the time the final proofs were to be sent to the press and although he at first wanted two or three days to comply with the ashram's request, gave his foreword within three hours of his return to the ashram so as not to hold up the work. Obviously he had not had time to read the commentary. In the course of a walk one evening, in reference to this, Shri Muruganar remarked to Shri Natananandar: "You know the *Akshara Mana Malai*, you know Bhagavan, and you know Muruganar; so you wrote the foreword." On receipt of the book, happening to glance through the commentary of Shri Muruganar on a particular verse therein, Shri Natananandar found that it was either similar or the same as his reference to that couplet he had made in his foreword. Such is the identity of appreciation, understanding and devotion of those two disciples to Bhagavan, His works and His teachings.

Mother Ramaa Devi

I think it was in the year 1949 for the first time I heard of Holy Mother Ramaa Devi from her devotee Shri Soundara Rajan, who was then on a visit to the ashram. Later, when on a visit to Madras I was staying with my friend Mrs. Krishnan, who is also a devotee of Mother. She asked me to accompany her one day to see the Mother but at first

I was not inclined to, desiring to know no other than Bhagavan. However, in quite a shortwhile something within me prompted me to change my mind and accompany my friend. I recalled that Bhagavan always emphasised the value of *satsang*. Mother was sitting on her bed in her room at the residence of Mr. Soundara Rajan in Thyagarayanagar. I was introduced as a devotee of Bhagavan. Mother told me that on the day of Bhagavan's *Mahanirvana*, she was at Madras and had felt the spirit of Bhagavan enter her heart and immediately felt as if she had had a bath in the Ganges. While talking to us of Bhagavan, she went off into *samadhi* and fell on to her bed and was in that state for 2 or 3 days. We went again to see her when she came back to normal consciousness. Then too she talked of Bhagavan and asked us to lunch at which making me sit next to her, she fed me with rice from which the scent of jasmine and sandalwood alternated. Becoming intimately acquainted with the Mother, I exchanged confidence with her.

What attracted me most to the Mother was that the Mother stands for the love of Shri Krishna, a love which can lift us above ourselves, our surroundings, possessions, friends and relations and give us a glimpse of the Divine Love; we share in the ecstasy of her frequent trances even if in the feeble and remote way in which alone it is possible for us to. She exemplified love, universal love in all her words and deeds. I have not seen her frown or use harsh words and everyone is within the ambit of her disinterested love. For all her greatness, she is modest and as simple as a child. Her devotion to her husband whom she calls her Lord is a shining example of *paativritya* for all women, and this great truth, Mother always tries to inculcate in her women devotees.

Bhagavan's *samadhi* work was proceeding at a very slow pace. Wishing to expedite the work, we decided to shift the *lingas* set up over the *samadhi* to a *Balalaya*. I went to Madras and told the Mother that we would be happy if Mother would be present at and perform the ceremony of *Balalaya*-

sthapana. Mother graciously agreed and came in the company of some 30 or 40 devotees. I had arranged for the Mother to stay at the Sathanur Guest House. It was a memorable occasion when with bhajan and other rites, the ceremony was performed on a grand scale. At the Arunachaleswarar Temple too, where I had taken the Mother, there was bhajan when a large crowd of the townsmen were present. On the day she left, a large number of persons were at the Guest House for her darshan and speaking before that audience, she said that the ashram lacked one thing. Why should not bhajan be organized at least once a week to surcharge the spiritual atmosphere of the ashram? The ashram Manager was then present. After Mother left, I sent for Shri M. K. Jagadeesa Nageswara Iyer from the town and despite his commitments, he agreed to conduct bhajan at the ashram every Thursday. He requested that conveyance might be provided for the party to and from the town. But the ashram Manager would then agree only to provide the conveyance back to the town. I however agreed to provide the conveyance from the town. But the ashram conveyance was not available on most of the occasions for a period of 11 months when the bhajan was conducted by the party, as it would be in the Manager's service for taking some member or other of his family to the cinema or to the town. Once the party was obliged to walk back to the town as the ashram conveyance had been sent to fetch a distant relation of the Manager from the town. The next day I spoke to the Manager and asked why he was misusing the ashram conveyance for his personal needs. He turned round and said: "Ma, stop this bhajan, I have no use for it."

But Mr. Jagadeesa Iyer did bhajan regularly just to oblige me every Thursday evening. When I told them very regretfully all that had happened, they were not at all surprised at the attitude of the Manager. But the bhajan was eventually stopped.

Sabar Pak

Not many amongst my readers may be aware of the beautiful mausoleum of the great Muslim saint, Sabar Pak (patient, clean or pure) a few miles off Dehra Dun in Uttar Pradesh, at the foot of the Himalayas. Many who have not even heard of this saint may have heard of his uncle, Salim Chishti, whose mazar — *samadhi* — near Delhi is a great centre of pilgrimage to all religiously-inclined people, of all races, religions and creeds. It was three or four centuries ago, that both these saints lived in India, when people had to travel across the country either in caravans or on foot and it took some weeks for people to reach Delhi from Lahore. The mother of Sabar Pak was in Lahore with this young son and without anyone to support her, her husband having passed away a few years ago. Too poor to support her eleven-year old son, she sent him in the company of a few others to Delhi where her brother, Chishti, already famous, was. Sabar Pak found this uncle absorbed in *samadhi* and waited for him to emerge from it for two days, without food. When the great saint opened his eyes, he enquired of the boy who he was and then gave him the keys of the vast store room where articles of all kinds were stored to feed a large gathering of devotees and told the boy to feed the people. The saint then went again into *samadhi*. For over a year this young boy looked after the store room, feeding all who came and himself ate only a few of the jungle figs that grew on a nearby tree. He kept himself alive on that food and water, because as he later said, his uncle had not told him to feed himself too although when he first saw him he knew that he had been fasting for two days. His uncle had given him the keys of the store room and asked him only to feed the people. His poor mother at Lahore dreamt for three consecutive nights that her beloved son was starving and on the third day she decided that somehow she must reach Delhi and see her son. She joined a caravan and reached Delhi and seeing how emaciated her son had become, took him and threw him on the lap of the famous saintly

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brother who was then in deep *samadhi*. Emerging from *samadhi*, the saint was astounded to learn that for a year his young nephew had been without food — so scrupulous had he been in carrying out the bidding of his uncle. He gave the nephew the name Sabar Pak meaning patient, clean and pure, a tribute to the utter patience and scrupulous character of the boy. Years later when the nephew was crossing his teens he told him that he (the uncle) saw that the nephew's place was at Dehra Dun and asked him to proceed to that place. Asked how he could find it, the uncle told him that he would stop proceeding further when he came to the spot of his own accord. This young saint obediently carried out the advice of the uncle and set out alone to his destination. On the way, attracted by the deep and great spiritual halo and force that surrounded this young saint, a few people joined him and they all reached the spot indicated by the saintly uncle. Here the young Sabar Pak began his austerities and stayed for nearly six years while about a dozen or two made his following and stayed with him, helping to feed him and themselves too. This place was quite a jungle in those days and was infested with thugs and other wild tribes. One night a band of robbers with burning torches were approaching the camp of this saint, which sent a wave of fear in the hearts of his few followers. The saint was then under a tree on a pile of stones, standing up with eyes heavenward in deep *samadhi*. The people appealed to him for help in their distress and the brigands were then quite near their camp. The young saint opened his eyes and lo! the whole gang of robbers was burnt to death. The saint chided his followers for their fear—for was not God the Almighty ever looking after their welfare? Why should they be afraid when God was there, ever ready to protect all His devotees? Within six months of this incident, when this young man was about 25 or 26 years of age, he informed his followers that he would be shedding the mortal coil. He did and was interred at the spot where his durga mazar is at present.

This is the story as it was narrated to me by Sita Devi, the Maharani of Tikai, some time about the year 1935. Readers may recall that it was this great friend who took me first to Buddha Gaya. Again it is to her I owe the first visit I paid to the mazar of this renowned saint in Dehra Dun.

The Maharani had returned from one of her trips to England. I think it was the year 1935 or so. As usual she was my guest in Bombay and I made her stay with me for over a week and engaged her all the while in the whirlpool of social activities in which I too was then engaged when I was not in Buddha Gaya at my *sadhana*. Secretly and without informing any one, the Maharani had tickets booked for me too to go to Dehra Dun. She told me that her secretary had purchased them without even informing her. I pleaded that my son Sohrab's examination was near but she coaxed my son to permit his mother to travel with her to Dehra Dun. Thus it came about that I had to accompany the Maharani. On the way she told me this story and of her experiences with this saint. We reached the city and I was taken to the durga which has a very low roof and into which none can enter but the caretaker, an aged person clad in white, looking grave and calm in his white beard. When I reached the mazar he was inside, cleaning it up, and greeted me with the words— 'So, child, you have come.' The atmosphere of the place was so enchantingly peaceful that I sat down and was deeply absorbed in meditation that it was quite a task for the Maharani to take me back home. "You would not come when I asked you and now you will not leave when I want you to," so said the Maharani teasing me. Deeply impressed by the calm and spiritual atmosphere of the mazar, the next day I gathered a few fine fruits and flowers, went to the place and offered the fruits to the caretaker. He would not take them. He said he lived on just three cups of tea every day and one day in the year — the Urs or birthday of the saint — he would take a plate of *pulav* that was made as an offering to the saint. He was then decorating with flowers the grave,

richly inlaid with marble, even as the *samadhi* of Shri Aurobindo at Pondicherry today is.

How this Maharani came to be devoted to this saint is itself a wonderful story. The Maharaja was involved in a heavy litigation and the Maharani sought the blessings of this saint on her husband's behalf. She had promised to feed the people who had assembled on the occasion of the Urs. But the people who had assembled far exceeded the expectation and she felt she would be humiliated if she could not feed them all. She went to the durga and prayed to this saint to help her. The food from the huge vessel in which it had been prepared was ever replenishing itself and was never exhausted; every one who came there was sumptuously fed. One of the sepoys there noticed that one among such came repeatedly for food and when accosted said that he was hungry. The sepoy could hardly believe that statement and gave him a few blows. Later a man appeared before the Maharani and showed her his back which bore the marks of the beating inflicted by the sepoy and told the Maharani that even while feeding the people she was beating them. The Maharani found that this person was the saint himself. He had told her of the beating inflicted on one of the people who had come repeatedly for the food which could never be exhausted. Little wonder then that the Maharani was deeply impressed with this saint and became an ardent devotee. She knew my leanings on the spiritual path and drew me on to this saint as well, even as she was responsible for my getting to know of the blessed Lord Buddha.

My son Sohrab had passed his B.A. Degree examination and I had promised to take him to a hill station. I took him to Mussourie. We were there for over a week and feeling an irresistible urge to visit this mausoleum, I went alone by car and found that the old attendant had passed away and been buried near the grave. I returned, after enjoying for quite a while the solemn peace radiating from and about the mazar.

Shri Satya Sai Baba

He is quite well-known not only in India but the world over. On 2nd March 1965 towards the evening, I returned from Madras rather tired and as I approached my door I was surprised to find a rather excited Prof. P. N. Driver, his wife Aloo and others awaiting me which made me fear for my aged and ailing mother. They waved a telegram from Shri Satya Sai Baba in my face and assuring me that mother was well, said that the telegram, a peremptory one, called me to Shri Baba at Puttaparthi on the 5th. I was tired and therefore not inclined to fall in with my friends who urged me to lead them along to the place. I told them I would give them a note. Retiring to bed, I reviewed my decision not only because the invitation had come unsolicited, but also because I did not like to disappoint my guests and friends whom the invitation had excited so much. We reached Puttaparthi about 10 a.m. on the 8th and to the gentleman who met me, I said I had come on the receipt of a telegram from Shri Baba, which I could not produce. He was not inclined to believe me and might have thought it was just a ruse to meet Shri Baba. When I told him to go and tell Shri Baba so, he seemed impressed and went in. He came back almost immediately, took us in and seated us amidst quite a large crowd of over a thousand persons, all awaiting the darshan of the saint. We had hardly been seated 10 minutes, when Shri Baba came out, walked straight to where Prof. Driver and Hugo Maier were seated among the gentlemen, took them inside and then sent for me and Aloo. That was the first darshan I had of Shri Baba—a handsome and striking personality. He greeted us all lovingly and very kindly, and taking me alone aside told me that he saw the hand of my Swami — meaning Bhagavan — on my shoulders and that he too would be with me. He placed his hands on my head and I asked him to place his hands on my heart and bless me that I might remember my Bhagavan with every breath of mine and never forget my Master. He said that Bhagavan was always in my thoughts and he granted

my request to bless my aged mother as well and he said that he was with her too. Two years later, on the afternoon of 13th February 1967, a party of about 4 people came to my residence in a car and told me that they had been asked by Shri Baba to call on me on their way back from a visit to him and to tell me that my mother would be passing away in a few days. I was not to worry or grieve over her, but to apply the *vibhuti prasad* he had sent to mother. He assured me that he was and would always be with my mother. My mother was greatly pleased with the spontaneous solicitude of the saint even as I was. She passed away early on 15th February, less than 48 hours of the message from Shri Baba, peacefully, just as if she had slept off and as if death had no terrors for her.

As we took leave of Shri Baba, he gave me a locket with his photo and asked us to attend the bhajan at which he himself sang very sweetly. We attended the *Veda Parayana* when about 50 boys, all clad beautifully in yellow uniform chanted the Veda. We were deeply impressed by the manner in which the Veda was recited and the deep interest the saint evinced in the proper recitation of the Veda. It was a very happy and memorable day in our lives indeed. Miss Gabriel, a Swiss lady who had been my guest, and was then with Shri Baba, entertained us to a lovely lunch at which a lot of excellent fruits were sent to us by Shri Baba himself. We heard there of many experiences of the devotees with Shri Baba. At 4 p.m. after tea, we made our way back to Bangalore and Tiruvannamalai.

I had occasion to meet him again in 1966, when I was in a crowd of over a thousand. He called me in and took my breath away saying, "Well, the work of building your Swami's *samadhi* has been given to you; but you must be careful of the three people you are with. They will try to obstruct you. You need not be afraid. I will be with you and you will finish the work of the *samadhi*." Yes, a number of obstacles were placed in the path of the early completion of the work but

my friends on the Board of Trustees — Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami and Shri Srinivasachari—greatly helped me to achieve one of my life's greatest ambitions.

On the days Shri Baba was in Madras on this occasion, I had some mission or other with him on behalf of one or other of my friends and I set them down here without mentioning names as they are all well-known not only in Madras but all over India. K, himself a doctor, was a bit troubled over a brain operation his wife's sister's daughter was to undergo and had asked me to speak to Shri Baba who gave *vibhuti prasad* and asked it be applied to her tongue and at the spot on her head where the operation was to be performed the next day or so. S's grandniece, a rather young girl, had been twice operated upon for a growth in the stomach and even after the operations she could hardly sleep on account of a pain which rendered her parents not only anxious but sleepless too. A third operation had been advised but the doctors held out little hope.

Shri Baba took the child, passed his holy hands over the abdomen, gave *vibhuti prasad* and advised that no treatment be given her for the next three months. That night, to the relief and surprise of the parents and the grand-uncle too, the child not only ate well but also slept well; and three months later when the doctors who had performed the earlier operations examined her, they were surprised and astonished to find that there was no growth in the stomach and that the child was normal. Needless to say the fond parents and the grand-uncle were greatly in debt to Shri Baba. T, a well-known engineer, would run temperature up to 100 degrees every afternoon and could find little or no relief in medicines. Shri Baba came to the residence of T, and in his own unique way effected the cure of the troublesome fever, much to T's relief.

Kumu Baba

I happened to come to Bombay some time after Bhagavan's *nirvana*. One day my nephew Dara Mody came to see me

and all of a sudden said, "Aunty, let me take you to Kumu Baba at Goregaon." I said, "No, dear, I never go to anyone." Dara said, "You will like him, do come. It will be a nice drive also." I am very fond of this boy, so I did not like to disappoint him. I agreed. His wife, he and I went. It was Sunday and Baba's place was full of devotees standing in a long queue, in the beautiful garden where he was sitting. I was told Baba was very fond of gardening and he took a deep interest in it himself. As soon as he saw us he shouted, "Oh, Ramanashram Ma has come." He gave me lots of fruits and said, "Do not stand and wait. You go and come tomorrow, please." Next day we went because of his single sentence. How did he know that I came from Ramanashram? He had never seen me before. He received me with much love and consideration, and made me sit by his side and started telling me all about our ashram troubles and my efforts to keep the ashram safe. He said, "You should be careful in dealing with the people there, whom you love and trust, as they are not what you think of them. Do be careful." How true was his prediction! It turned out to be true. I visited Baba later many times and every time he warned me and at the same time said, "No one can ever hurt or harm you as you are under Bhagavan's protection." This was said to me by many saints and very strongly by Satya Sai Baba also. Kumu Baba is all love. I am told that he had the good fortune to be with Sai Baba, the great and renowned Saint of Shirdi, who left His body fifty years ago. Those who are seekers of Love should go to Baba. He will fill you up with great love.

Swami Sivananda of Rishikesh

In the course of my tour of North India in 1956 along with Hansa, Balaram Reddy and Venkataraman, we had occasion to visit Shri Swami Sivananda's ashram and stay there for about three days. We were well received and comfortably lodged and shown round not only the ashram but also the

surrounding places of importance. On the day we were leaving the ashram, Shri Swami Sivananda came out to bid us good-bye even though it was much earlier than his usual hour and asked me if Venkataraman had told me of the private conversation he had had with Shri Swamiji relating to the management of ashrams. I replied in the affirmative. Speaking of management of ashrams, Swamiji said that only *sadhus* and *brahmacharis* should be entrusted with their management as only they could do justice to it, having no other interests in life. *Grihasthas*, burdened with other cares, could hardly do any good. Then referring to his favourite topic, *sanyas*, he said, he was prepared to confer that ashram of *sanyas* even on Hansa, a young girl who had accompanied us. I told Swamiji that I would first let Hansa have a good husband. Immediately Swamiji told her a mantra and wrote it out himself in three languages. I am glad to say that Hansa is happily married now to the joy of her parents. When Swamiji first saw Hansa he enquired what her nationality was and on learning that she hailed from Kerala, he introduced her to his devotees hailing from that part of our country and they fell to talking to her in Malayalam. I was deeply impressed by the deep love and kindness they bestowed on their guests and the way they attended to their welfare.

Mother Tara Bai

Disconsolate after the *Mahanirvana* of Bhagavan, I had gone to Bombay and there a friend told me of a lady saint, Mother Tara Bai, a Maharashtrian. I was not quite in the frame of mind to go to see any saint, having been long with Bhagavan. However, acting on the impulse of a moment, I went and was greeted with a remark that astounded me: "Oh, Oh, at last you have come." Gracious and kind, she remarked that I had no need to go anywhere as she saw that Bhagavan was with me, but she warned me to be careful of my environment since the people I was with were not what I took them

Spiritual Personages

for. I had worked hard for the ashram. "I know your heart is full of love. One day you will find that the love has been wasted on those who are unworthy of it. Don't be annoyed, but I would rather devote my life to *sadhana* than try to help such people." Unaware of her far-sightedness, I laughed in my sleeve as I could not believe what she said could ever come true. I visited her several times, alone and with friends and have been invited by her to lunch which she herself would prepare. During some of these visits, I was very much impressed by her readings of the past as also of the future of my friends and among numerous such, one stands out. I had taken along with me D.P. and introduced her to this saint as my daughter, to which she remarked that I had just missed it — referring obviously to the idea I had of getting her married to my son. I told the Mother of the beautiful house of D.P.'s when she said that besides the house, D.P. had lands as well and that she must be a little careful of her health as she had undergone some operation and was then suffering from thrombosis. On our way back, D.P. told me that while she was impressed with the saint, she felt that it was not quite right to say that her husband had left her any property other than the house. Two or three weeks later, I was called on the telephone and D. P. told me that enquiries made by her father and friends have shown that it was true her husband had left other extensive properties of which she had no knowledge and wanted to meet the saint to apologise for the doubt that had crossed her mind earlier. No sooner did we enter the saint's presence than she asked if D.P. had received the letter and warned her to be careful and take help in the matter of taking possession of the lands. Many friends introduced by me to this saint have been deeply impressed by her powers of clairvoyance. But what impressed me most of all was her great love for one and all.

The Unknown Sadhu

I was about 11 years or so then and we were at Kalam in the

former Hyderabad State. My childhood had been a difficult one for me as I always had differences with my mother whose love I missed, and who would constantly find fault with me. When we were at this place, mother caustically told me to go and die, and taking it literally, I made up my mind to die and went up the nearby hill and sat down on a big flat rock, crying. A sadhu clad in ochre robes and with an attractive face, came up to me and asked me why I was crying and told me to cease crying, wipe my face and to pray. He told me that I had a wonderful and exciting life before me, that later on in life I would meet many like him, that I am under great protection and have the blessings and grace of saints and sages. He asked me to go home and to think of him whenever I felt upset and depressed. To my question who he was and why he was interested in me, he vouched no reply and told me not to question him. He touched my face, placed his hands on my head and taking me by the hand, led me down the steep hill towards my house and left me some distance from it. I saw him going some way up the hill and disappear to my view and have not met him since. The reader will judge if his predictions for me turned out to be true.

On return home, I went to sleep, skipping food and commending myself to my lucky star for the pleasant talk I had had with a rare person who had poured into me the wine of great joy. I could never believe it that I had been in the presence of a man who could read hearts, cure ailments, mental and physical, and restore courage to enfeebled souls. Thereafter my mother's remarks and rebuffs never upset me and several dreams, some wonderful, came to me in sleep. I remember one of them vividly to this day.

I was walking in a large forest full of big trees when suddenly I came upon a large grave, around which dry leaves had fallen. A big tiger came up just then and I climbed on to the big branch of a nearby tree. My fright was so great that I could not tie up my luxuriant growth of hair, nor see my hands with which to gather up the falling hair. I started

repeating 'Ram, Ram.' The tiger swept the grave with its tail and left slowly. I wakened on hearing a sweet voice calling to me. The next morning I could not recall this dream and for a second time too the dream repeated that night, which again I could not recall the morning after. The third night I went to bed with a paper and pencil to record it, should the dream repeat itself as it did.

A Saint from Kailasa

One day about 25 people came and amongst them their Guru — a tall, fair, handsome old man sat the whole day before Bhagavan. He asked Bhagavan in beautiful Hindi, which I translate:

"Bhagavan! Since 25 years I am doing my *tapas* in Kailas, never minding the bitter cold or anything, but I find the peace here is so very great — Why?"

Bhagavan kept silent. He asked again and again, then I said: "Bhagavan, he says he has to go now and would like to know from Bhagavan the reason." Bhagavan turned round and said: "Lord Siva and Parvathi are in Arunachala, so naturally you will find more peace here!"

When he was leaving I ran after him and said, "Maharaj, bless me by putting your hand on my head." He said, "Oh, Ma, I see you are fortunate enough to have His full grace — do not leave Him — you are blessed." Saying this he embraced me leaving me in admiration of his majestic personality — even now he comes before my eyes.

Shri Dada Dilipkumar Roy and Shrimati Indiradevi Ma

Dada comes from a very highly cultured Bengali family. He is highly educated, refined and gentle. He took to the spiritual life under the guidance of Shri Aurobindo. He then settled down at Pondicherry. Shri Aurobindo and the

Mother were loving and kind to Dadaji. He has written many interesting, and inspiring books on spiritual topics. He has now founded a lovely ashram and a beautiful temple called Harikrishna Mandir at Poona. Surrounded by many devotees, the live force of this ashram is the Mother Indiraji who is a great artist. She has given up everything worldly under the prompting of some inner call. With Dadaji, her Guru, she gracefully and lovingly manages the ashram. You don't hear her speak but everything goes well, under her supervision; she commands only with her eyes. She does everything with love and perfection. I never missed visiting the ashram whenever I visited Poona. Once I stayed for four days in the ashram which is full of love, bliss and peace. Dadaji is a well-known musician and a singer and so is Indiraji too. I took my family friends to the Harikrishna Temple and they were struck with awe by the morning music of Dadaji and Indiraji. We left the ashram reluctantly that day. Devotees gathered there with great love and devotion. The whole atmosphere in the temple is charged with great love.

I would sincerely request all those who daily gather there, to take the fullest advantage of Dadaji's and Indiraji's love and grace and make themselves perfect in their *sadhana*. Let no seeker after love and peace miss the opportunity of paying a visit to these two great loving souls and getting the benefit of their grace and see for themselves how the ashram is run only through love and prayers. Visitors are always reminded of the great saint Mirabai when they see Indiraji and hear her devotional songs. They seem to get a glimpse of Krishna in the form of Dadaji.

XV

SPIRITUAL INSTITUTIONS

Shri Ramakrishna Mission—Site for a Students' Hostel—Yogoda Sai Sangh—Daya Mata—Yoga Institute, Santa Cruz.

Shri Ramakrishna Mission

During the period of my austerities at Buddha Gaya, I had occasions to visit Calcutta and the Belur Math too and read about Shri Ramakrishna. I would be in Buddha Gaya a few months in the year, and the rest of the period in Bombay, where I began to interest myself in the Shri Ramakrishna Mission at Khar, of which Shri Swami Sambuddhananda, a learned and deeply religious Swamiji, was the head. Even after coming to Tiruvannamalai, whenever I was in Bombay I took the opportunity of visiting the Shri Ramakrishna Mission. Although my husband was not interested in the Mission as such, he would sometimes accompany me on these visits for the very nice lunches the Swamiji would give us. One morning I had a phone call from the Swamiji asking me to lunch and when I reached the place a little earlier than the appointed time, the Swamiji was at his bath. Idly looking about, I noticed a piece of vacant land adjacent to the Mission and thought that if it could be acquired for the Mission, it would make a suitable place for the location of a college. I spoke to the Swamiji and asked him to find out the owner and let the question of finding the finance lie over to solve itself.

Site for a Students' Hostel

It is curious how the problem solved itself. G, a multi-millionaire, was a neighbour of ours living a few doors off us

and a frequent guest at our place. He found himself in hot water with the Government just about this time perhaps over some matter of taxation. He knew that the chief of the concerned department of the Government in Bombay was a friend of mine and taking advantage of this knowledge, approached me to tell the chief of his plight and the loss of face he would incur by reason of the action the Government had taken and asked me to intervene on his behalf. I was a little reluctant but he coaxed me hard. Finally we drove together in his car to the office of this chief. The surprised chief asked me what had brought me to his office. He had some hard words for G who according to him deserved little sympathy. I was however importunate and finally the chief gave in with much reluctance. I told him that contrary to all his fears he would soon be promoted. The matter between the department and G was quickly settled to the satisfaction of both.

Within a month or two I had the satisfaction of knowing that my word to the chief had come true, for, for a wonder, he found that he had been promoted to be chief of his department at the Centre.

The highly pleased G who along with Shri Swami Sambuddhananda had accompanied me to the chief, on being told of the project for the Shri Ramakrishna Mission I had in my mind, found the funds for the purchase of the plot for the Mission and on this site a hostel for college students has now been built and it was opened by Shri Jawaharlal Nehru. I had asked Shri Swami Sambuddhananda to go with me to the chief at his office, since I felt that somehow or other I would succeed and wanted G to help the Mission at Khar. The Swamiji too played some part in bringing to a successful conclusion the settlement between the department and G.

I may well relate here a sequel to this incident, even if it has no bearing on the Shri Ramakrishna Mission. After Bhagavan's *Mahanirvana* I was in Delhi as the guest of a friend. I happened to meet this chief and his family quite by

accident there and he recalled my 'prediction' for him and also the events that led up to it, all of which only made me take advantage of his kindness for this friend of mine who was also in a position not dissimilar to that of G and had the matter smoothly settled, again to the satisfaction of both the Government and my friend.

Shri Swami Sambuddhananda, the chief of the Shri Ramakrishna Mission at Bombay had been a great friend of mine and would visit me once a week at my residence and guide me in my *sadhana* and tell me interesting anecdotes of Shri Ramakrishna and the Holy Mother. In 1956, when on a tour of pilgrimage of North India with my friends, we went to the Belur Math. The President of the Math was then ill and in bed. That however did not prevent him from sending for me to his bedside when he heard that I was there and he deputed a swamiji to show us around the Math. Years have passed since I met either Shri Swami Sambuddhananda or any of the monks of the Shri Ramakrishna Order but I entertain still the same regard and love for them all. They are a fine band of selfless sadhus dedicated to the great cause conceived by Shri Swami Vivekananda and free from that degrading vice — greed.

Letter to me from Swami Sambuddhananda from R. K. Mission, Calcutta.

"It gives me a great pleasure to remember the most pleasant occasions that I had the rare privilege to enjoy while at Bombay.

It was not once or twice but on many occasions when I had to accept your active selfless services for the cause of the helpless and needy people of Bombay. I remember fully well how you used to come forward with your helping hand and ungrudging services for the amelioration of the distressed people.

Sometimes we had also noticed how you, ignoring the distinction between the rich and the poor, had come forward to relieve the difficulties of the magnates of Bombay. You had

also shown your keen intelligence in solving the problems of life of the people facing them with your usual undaunted courage and noble spirit. Instances are too many to quote which, I am afraid, will not be permitted by the little space of a letter that we happen to address to each other in time. Your selfless services, spotless purity in your own life will serve as a beacon light to hundreds and thousands of people wallowing and suffering in the darkness and wilderness of life.

May the great God, the Almighty, shower His choicest blessings upon you and those who would care to follow the glorious foot-prints of your life.

Swami Sambuddhananda."

Yogoda Sat Sangh

I can speak only with great love of the Yogoda Sat Sangh as it was at their headquarters in India at Ranchi I first came to hear of my Lord Shri Ramana and happened to see a book containing several photos of His, which kept me awake till long past midnight, thinking of Him and longing to be with Him. It all happened this way. I was in Buddha Gaya one year when I observed a rigorous penance of 91 days, keeping silence during the period and contenting myself with just one cup of *kichadi* every day at noon. After this austere routine, I was a bit run down; my friend Swami Shri Satyananda of the Self-Realization Fellowship took me to Ranchi where the Yogoda Sat Sangh has a school set amidst sylvan surroundings. I was greatly taken up with the place, with the cultured group of devoted sadhus who were selflessly dedicated to the task of imparting a good education to about three hundred well-disciplined boys. My impression is that Swami Paramahansa Yogananda was able to send the school only just so much funds as would help Shri Satyananda to maintain it; he could not find the funds for renovation of the rather dilapidated buildings in which the school was housed and which were hardly in tune with the surroundings. It was my good fortune to have been able to influence the

generous Shri Jugal Kishore Birla of revered memory to help renovate these buildings. When I was there, I was introduced to a young man among the sadhus, who I was told, was the son of wealthy parents, had renounced that life he was born into for the life of a sadhu and dedicated it to the cause of a Harijan Boys' school there. This young man attracted me and he invited me to open the school there, but always disinclined to take part in such ceremonies, I declined. Somehow, he managed to take me to this school. He made me perform the ceremony without the usual fanfare that attends such functions. He asked me about my *sadhana* and the *tapas* I did at Buddha Gaya and when he had heard me, he told me of Shri Ramana Maharshi and said that I must meet Him. He then gave me his illustrated book on Bhagavan, the photo of Bhagavan which attracted me greatly and held me even at first sight and made me feel that this young man was right when he said that I must meet Him. After that long wakeful night spent in the thought of Shri Ramana, I wrote the next morning to Shri Ramanashram whether I could go over. Their reply that I would come when the time for it came stunned me. This reply upset me not a little and from Ranchi, I returned to Bombay instead of going to Tiruvannamalai.

Shri Paramahansa Yogananda in the United States was informed by Swami Satyananda of what I had done to influence Shri Jugal Kishoreji to renovate the buildings. He wrote to me a nice letter of thanks and when in 1939 I was in the States with B and her son J, he sent one of his followers, a Swami, with his car to take me to Encinitas where his Golden Temple is. He lavished love and kindness on me and almost entreated me to stay on in the United States as the head of some branch of the Fellowship. He had heard of my close association with the Fellowship in India, of my efforts to popularize it in Bombay, founding a branch there as also of my efforts to persuade friends of status and wealth to be interested in the movement. Tempting as the offer he had

so kindly made was, and in spite of my high esteem for the spontaneously kind and generous people of America, I told him regretfully that my destiny lay not with the Self-Realization Fellowship but at Arunachala at the feet of Bhagavan and nowhere else. Even after I left the States, Shri Yogananda corresponded with me hopefully until he too concluded that I was not to be in his camp.

Shri Swami Satyananda met me in 1956 at Calcutta when we were on a tour of the North Indian pilgrim centres and accompanied us on the pilgrimage up to Banaras. He visited Bhagavan later as my guest as did even Shri Swami Sambuddhananda.

Daya Mata

In 1968, Sister Daya Mata, the successor of Swami Yogananda as the head of the Self-Realization Fellowship in the States was on a visit to India. I took the opportunity to meet her at Bombay and it was quite a pleasure to know that what I had done for that movement was remembered with love, even after the lapse of years.

It was thus my good fortune, before I came to Shri Ramana, to have done something substantial for these two movements in India, the Shri Ramakrishna Mission and the Yogoda Sat Sangh, as later it was given to me to be of help to Shri Ramanashram as well. I render my humble thanks to the Almighty for helping me to help so many good causes.

Yoga Institute, Santa Cruz

I failed in my effort to build the Home of Devotion in the company of Shri Yogendra and his beloved wife Sita Devi. But I am glad that they succeeded in their efforts to build a fine Yoga Ashram in the midst of the busy metropolis of Bombay at Santa Cruz although they call it by the name Yoga Institute. Many foreigners too have been attracted by the yoga courses offered by this Institute and many are the people who have been restored to good health by the yogic

methods of the Institute. When in 1967, after the lapse of long years, I visited this Institute, the force of my husband's remark that everything one expects of an ashram life can be had even in a city, came home to me. So well is the Institute run that every Indian can be proud of it and may it be given to this devoted couple to set up such Institutes elsewhere in India too. It is a pity that while I was of some help to Shri Ramakrishna Mission and the Yogoda Sat Sangh, I could do little for these two friends.

XVI

POLITICAL LEADERS

Mahatma Gandhi—Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel—Lala Lajpat Rai—
Rajaji—Kamaraj.

Mahatma Gandhi

In 1927 I was in Bangalore, convalescing after an operation for cancer in the left arm, when I heard that Gandhiji was then there, at Kumara Park as the guest of the Government. Though ill and not quite recovered from the effects of the operation, I wrote to Gandhiji that I would like to call on him in person and received from him the reply given below:

Kumara Park,
Bangalore.
7—6—1927

Dear Friend,

I was delighted to receive your letter. I came down here on Sunday. Do please come any day you like except Mondays when I am silent. 4 o'clock is the best time for me. I hope you are feeling better.

Yours sincerely,
M. K. GANDHI.

I had earlier been introduced to Gandhiji at a reception accorded to him on his return from South Africa by Sir Jhangir Petit, but that was quite a long while ago. Bapu greeted me very lovingly. I could not wear my sari properly

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on account of the operation in my arm. Bapu enquired into every little detail of the operation and of my health. He greatly appreciated my remark that I carried death in my hand as anything might happen any moment. He ordered a glass of fruit juice for me and told Shri Mahadev Desai, his secretary, my story. Bapu asked me to call on him every day as long as he was in Bangalore and directed that I might always be freely admitted. It thus became my daily routine to be with Bapu every day except Mondays. What deep interest Gandhiji and Kasturba evinced in me! I became great friends with Ba. On the day Gandhiji left Bangalore I was rather upset. I went to his place and our parting was sad. He made me promise that I would keep him informed of my health and that I would strictly adhere to the doctor's injunctions in that regard. When Gandhiji was later at Bardoli he invited me there. Bapu was as usual solicitous about my comfort at Bardoli, Abbas Tyabji and Father Verrier Elwin were with Gandhiji then. Bapu asked me to stay with him and join him in his campaign. I tried to laugh him off but Bapu was quite earnest and I told him I was not interested in politics and would be of no help to him except to make him laugh with my small talk and spoil his earnestness. One night I asked him what I would have to do if I joined him. He told me that he would first shave off my hair and that I would have to do even the work of cleaning the water closets. The state of the water closets had always repulsed me and that was why he wanted me to undertake such work. I told Shri Mahadev Desai that I would never obey Bapu in the matter. This topic came up in our talk every day and Bapu made it a test of my love for him that I would join him on his terms. My family liked the idea of my throwing in my lot with Gandhiji. My brother-in-law, Mr. F. S. Taleyarkhan, who later became a judge of the High Court of Bombay, had been Gandhiji's colleague in London where they had both studied law. He had great love and regard for Gandhiji. I was the subject of a critical examination by my family on my

return to Bombay and they were happy and relieved to find that I could hardly bring myself to cross the first two tests posed by Bapu.

Gandhiji would visit Bombay often and I would visit him on all these occasions, fan him while he was resting in the afternoons and regale him with my small talk, making him laugh and relax. During one such visit, the question of Gandhiji going to the Round Table Conference in London came up for discussion and I was as usual with Bapu. I was knitting in a corner of the room when Jawaharlal came up and told me that a very confidential meeting was to be held just then. Gandhiji told him to leave me alone and asked me to carry on with my knitting. I did not pay any attention to the discussion amongst the leaders as my mind was on the work I had on hand and also for the reason that politics never interested me. I marked however a certain leading personality go out immediately after a firm decision had been arrived at and spit out of the window into the open ground. The next morning my husband took me to task for not tipping him off in time of the decision arrived at by Bapu, as he could have made a pile on the Share Market even as the other person did. I replied that God had been sufficiently kind and besides we had only one son. I could not betray confidence. When the hint was dropped that I should leave the place, Bapu let me remain! The next afternoon Bapu remarked on my reticence while fanning him and I told him what had happened. Bapu asked me why I did not take advantage also. I told him that I considered his love and trust in me too great to be bartered even for tons of money and asked him whether I came to him seeking such favours and not for the love of Ba and him. Gandhiji told me that it was for that reason he wanted me to join him. I could serve him, but I could not bring myself to like the company he kept! Something in me told me that I was different from them all. My reply greatly endeared me to Gandhiji. The next day I told Gandhiji that as my brother-in-law F. S. Taleyarkhan was ill

I could not attend on him as usual. Gandhiji asked to go with me to see him. We got into a rickety Ford and went to his residence in Marine Lines, to the astonishment not only of my family but of all the residents of the place as well, and to the delight of my brother-in-law. To my sister-in-law who was greatly interested in social work, Gandhiji wrote in her autograph book in Gujarati:

“Seva Dharm Sarva dharmathi uttam che.
Kari sevamae saroon sarir mehanath joech.
Ena avi seva pan satya ane prem bina nuj
thysakey. Bapu.”

[Service is the noblest form of dharma. True service demands much physical labour. Without truth and love there can be no service. Bapu.]

My brother-in-law asked me to go back with Bapu and we left. Preparations were afoot for Gandhiji's voyage to England and I was asked to join him. I said jokingly that I was afraid of his two conditions, that I was a worshipper at the altar of beauty, and that my ideas differed from his. Bapu obtained for me a special pass to go on board his boat when he was leaving for England; as we were bidding him farewell, he took hold of my hands and said he would not allow me to go back to the land and that I would be accompanying him and not to worry about my clothes. The parting was sad for me and I kissed both Bapu and Ba and came ashore. Sometime thereafter I came to Bhagavan and we had no occasion to meet except once in 1942 at Shantiniketan. Then he and Ba made kind enquiries of me. Bapu told me I was ungrateful. I replied that I continued to love and esteem them highly but my way of life happened to differ from his. Guru Dev Rabindranath Tagore had a play enacted for Gandhiji and Bapu made me sit next to him and promise that I would go to Delhi and be with him for some time when he was there. I was however back at the ashram and was too deeply involved

in its activities to go to Delhi. It was a great shock to me, as it was to all my countrymen, to hear over the radio of the murder of Gandhiji. I was then at Madras raising funds for the ashram and it was a matter of great regret to me that I was not at Delhi when Bapu himself had asked me to go to Delhi.

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel

I received a message from Sardar Patel in 1927 to arrange to raise funds for flood relief work in Gujarat. I was then at Bangalore. I had known Sardar Vallabhbhai for quite a long time and being good friends with him, wanted to help to the best of my capacity. I contacted my friends, Lady Barton, the wife of the Resident, Lady Bannerjee, wife of Sir Albion, then Dewan of Mysore, Lady Mirza Ismail, wife of Sir Mirza, then Huzur Secretary to the Government of Mysore, and a number of other ladies on what could be done. A great musician, Countess Zainab Skipwith, was with us then, who, considering my theatrical talents, suggested the production of a play or a pantomime. The idea caught on and work started to that end. Working hard with the help of the wives of the army officers stationed in Bangalore, I arranged for the production of scenes from Omar Khayyam under the title *Oriental Pageant*. It was a variety entertainment consisting of scenes from Omar Khayyam, eastern dances, tableaux, Indian and western music accompanied by pantomime exhibition. The performance was held at the Opera House Theatre, Bangalore on the 17th, 18th and 19th of November 1927. On the 25th, at the same theatre, the Oriental Pageant Dance was held when over 250 guests were present. In the interregnum between the dances one or other piece from the Oriental Pageant was produced. The Pageant on the three days and the dance on the 25th were greatly appreciated by the elite of Bangalore, at which the Maharajah of Mysore and the Resident were also present. A sum of Rs. 40,000 was raised for the purpose of flood relief which amount was acknowledged by Sardar Patel.

Shri Vallabhbhai's affection and regard for me was such that when Shri Rajaji was leaving Rashtrapathi Bhavan in New Delhi on his way to Tiruvannamalai for the opening of the Shri Patalalinga Temple, he and his daughter Maniben hurried up there to hand over to Shri Rajaji personally his message to me on that occasion as follows:

"Please convey to Feroza Taleyarkhan my best wishes on the occasion of the opening ceremony of Patalalinga Temple. May it continue to serve the spiritual needs of an increasingly wide circle of devotees."

I visited in a daring way Sardar and Gandhiji when they were in the Yeravada Central Prison. My husband, I and a few relations were camping in Poona for about a week when these leaders were in that prison. All of us had to visit a relation of my sister who was a patient in the Yeravada Mental Hospital and we went there in a fleet of cars. On our way back, I managed to send the rest of the party ahead of me and securing a car solely for my use I made the driver take me to the Central Prison at Yeravada, where I just slid past the sentry saying that I had a pass which I did not have and ran to where Gandhiji and Sardar were, under the shade of a tree. Both were astounded to see me and Gandhiji who hated lies, asked me how I had managed to 'smuggle' myself in. He said jocularly that he would see I was locked up too so that I could not get out. I told him that I was very anxious to meet them and being in Poona for only a week and knowing that my husband would frown on any attempt I might make to meet them, I had managed by a stratagem not only to escape from them all but to gain entry into the prison itself. In my joy at seeing them both, I embraced them warmly and was bubbling with happiness when in walked the Superintendent demanding my pass. I told him that I was not a politician and that only my overpowering love for

Gandhiji made me enter the prison in breach of the rules. The sentry, I assured the Superintendent, was not guilty of any lapse from duty. The Superintendent who had a soft corner for Gandhiji, was a Britisher and a 'jolly good sport', fell in with the spirit of my adventure, gave me some more time with them both and then ushered me out of the jail.

When India attained independence, I had occasion again to meet the Sardar—his door was always open to me even as Gandhiji's was—on behalf of my friends, the Princes of India. The question of the merger of the Indian States was then on the anvil and I approached the Sardar to point out that the step they were thinking of was not in the interests of the country or of the Princes. Sardar Patel received me with love and kindness and patiently pointed out that the times were changing fast; that the plans they had in mind were essentially in the interests of the Princes and that the word he and Gandhiji had pledged to them in the matter of the settlement of their claims would be safe and secured. I wonder!

The nuances of genteel life, it has been said, were alien to the Sardar and it has been remarked that he was very gruff in manner. But he had a kind and understanding heart, as this one instance within my knowledge will show. Settlements with the Princes on their privy purses had been taken up and I knew several of them intimately. When I heard that the Sardar was visiting a certain State in that connection, I approached him to meet the Maharani—a person very dear to me—and safeguard her interests while making the settlement. He phoned to the Maharani on his arrival there, paid her a visit, and lent a patient ear to the representations she had to make and made a just settlement that helped her to be self-reliant. So kind was he to people in difficulties, irrespective of status. It is our misfortune that he died so soon after Indian Independence. Who can say what course Indian History would have taken had he been spared to us?

Lala Lajpat Rai

Very very early in life it was my good fortune to become acquainted with and be the favourite of one of India's great political leaders, a fact of which I was then not aware, being just a child.

My father's aunt—his mother's sister—had married rather late in life and was childless. They were wealthy and lived in Karachi. She wanted me to be sent to Karachi to keep her company and my uncle—my mother's brother—took me there. That was my first voyage even as a tiny little girl. At Karachi my uncle fell ill and shifted residence to Clifton—a seaside resort a few miles out of the city of Karachi where they had two or three bungalows of their own and we occupied one. Some time after we took up residence there, I noticed that the bungalow next to ours had been taken up by the Government and lots of carriages were coming in and going out; there were sentries posted and people in that bungalow were rather busy rushing about here and there. One evening a party of people arrived and took up residence in that bungalow, and among them I well remember a tall gentleman with a beard. While I was walking on the beach that evening or the evening after his arrival there, I came across him and we became great friends. He was much taken up with me for the fluent Urdu I spoke, which he enjoyed very much. Gradually it came to pass that I would spend even the day with him, taking my food with him. I heard from my elders that this person was a prisoner, but could never imagine how such a dear person as he could be one—I had always associated in my mind only evil looking criminals with prisons and prisoners. I wondered what he could have done to be a prisoner. He loved me greatly and told me that he would like me to be his daughter and would take me away and educate me and make a famous woman of me. He used to tell me exciting stories of rajas and ranis even as in my father's place, the sepoys would regale us with stories of princes and princesses. On enquiry I learnt that the name

of this kind gentleman was Lala Lajpat Rai, the great Indian patriot and the Lion of the Punjab. Happening to meet my uncle and aunt one day, Lala Lajpat Rai told them that he would adopt me as his daughter. This frightened them both. They were very rich and in need of an heir to their vast wealth. I was therefore prohibited from meeting him thereafter and thus even at an early age my trials began. I did not like to be prevented from seeing him. Therefore my uncle and aunt decided to transfer their residence back to Karachi so that I could have no occasion to meet him. The thought that I would miss meeting this kindly, loving man made me sore. When I told Lalaji of our intended departure, he too was moved to tears. Being a prisoner at that moment, he was helpless and he told me that once he was free he would meet me and adopt me and take me with him. As we left Clifton for Karachi, he and the members of his family were at the gate to bid me a tearful goodbye and little did I know then that that was the last I would see of him.

Rajaji

What am I to write of the greatness of Rajaji, "one of the world's wisest statesmen" in the words of Mr. Richard Nixon? I was drawn to him greatly even on the first occasion I met him by his love, consideration, kindness and humility. Perhaps he bestows his kindness in equal measure on everyone who has occasion to meet him. I don't know. I admire him highly for keeping up a promise he had once made in spite of opposition. Even as Governor-General he was simple and frank. When he was Home Minister in the Government of India, I had his permission to call on him at 4 p.m. every day. I was then asked to show him Bhagavan's Will with many words in it underlined in the hand of Venkataraman. Rajaji would hardly look at it but handed it back immediately to me asking me never to disclose it lest I should, in spite of my great devotion and love for Bhagavan, bring Bhagavan down in the eye of the public as it was just impossible for Bhagavan

to claim to be the owner of property which He could dispose of by Will. When Shri Devdas Gandhi passed away, I hesitated to send him a letter of condolence, lest it should be an impertinence to one so strong as he. But when I did write, he replied me characteristically as under:

"Dear sister,

Thanks for your loving message. You over-estimate me. I am still a weak mortal. Your loving thought is sustaining.

With Love.

C. RAJAGOPALACHARI."

I always felt an urge whenever I was in Madras to meet Rajaji. On one such occasion I told him, touching his feet, that I always pray for his health and long life as he was India's greatest asset. He thanked me and asked me in his sweet way: "Will you pray for D. M. K. also along with me!" Such is his dear heart and greatness!

K. Kamaraj

Eyebrows may be lifted when I speak of Shri Kamaraj in the same breath as I do of these giants. I have known Kamaraj, not as a politician, but as a good and sincere man, who kept his word, and who when he complied with a request made to him, did so in such a way that it seemed a favour granted to him by the supplicant. His great and touching humility, his utter lack of pomp, his robust commonsense, his innate shrewdness and understanding of human nature, have endeared him to me. He may have lacked the formal education as others have enjoyed but his commonsense made up for this lack. He is a strong yet silent man, a man of few words. I met him first in 1948 on the occasion of the arrangements for the opening of the Shri Patalalinga Temple by the Governor-General and after Bhagavan's *Mahasamadhi*, had to meet him often as Chief Minister, in connection with the affairs

of the ashram then under threat of a 'takeover' from the Hindu Religious Endowments Board. He granted all the favours I sought of him. But he would warn me every time I was wrong, as time has proved. Once it was my painful duty to pull up certain high officials who in the course of a heated discussion among themselves were running down the Government of India and the State. I had to tell them of the sterling qualities of this man Kamaraj who seemed unlearned in English but was very learned in the ways of the human heart. They felt sorry and thanked me for setting them right. I respect this great yet humble man. Personally too he has been kind to me, never failing to call on me whenever he was in Tiruvannamalai. He would sit with my aged mother as long as he could. Perhaps on the political and intellectual plane other political leaders may be his superiors but on the level on which I have met him, on the spiritual level and as human beings, these differences hardly count and what the man is, is what counts. It is for philosophers to consider whether at the spiritual level, all differences between man and man cannot be settled without bad blood for the everlasting good of man. As a mere woman, I can only pray for that end, as pointed out by Bhagavan.



J. K. Birla



Author's Tapas at Buddha Gaya



Lord Siva as appeared in the Author's dream



Gurupriya Devi



Baba Jan



Author with Maharshi



Receiving the Governor-General at Patalalinga Temple



Opening of the Patalalinga Temple by Rajaji



Rajaji at the Patalalinga Temple



Rajaji's admiration for Lord Siva



Mother Ananda Mayi in her deep *Samadhi*



Ma Ananda Mayi's *Samadhi* donned with natural ease



MOTHER ANANDA MAYI
(The soothing smile chases away the looming shadows of the mind)



My Dhunmai Tarapore



Dina and Roda



"GOOD THOUGHTS"
(A scene from a play in which the author took part)

XVII

PROMINENT PERSONALITIES

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan—H. H. Maharani of Baroda—Shri M. Bhaktavatsalam—Her Highness the Begum of Bhopal—Shri Jugal Kishore Birla—Mr. Paul Brunton—Lady "K"—A Prince's Query—Shri E. V. Ramaswami Naicker—Mr. J. H. Tarapore—Lady Willingdon—Shri Yusuf Meher Ali.

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan

Two towering personalities stand out today in this land of ours. They are Shri Rajaji and Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. It is my good fortune to be intimately acquainted with both of them for a number of years. I met Dr. Radhakrishnan in my society days and since then we have been great friends. He was usually far away from Bombay where I was, being either in Calcutta or in England if he was not going about the world on lecture tours; but never did he miss paying me a call at my residence in Marine Drive, whenever he was in Bombay, however brief the visit. I was not — and still am not — a philosopher at all and my talks on spiritual or philosophical matters with him and my utter ignorance of the subject would greatly entertain him and help him recover sanity in a troubled world, even as my small talk did with Gandhiji. In 1939 I was in Calcutta for raising funds for the Yogoda Sat Sangh and Dr. Radhakrishnan met me almost every day. He became better acquainted with me there, my line of thought and my *sadhana* at Buddha Gaya, which greatly appealed to him. Impressed with my *sadhana*, even then he insisted that I should write my life story. When we were considering plans for sending my son Sohrab to England for further studies Dr. Radhakrishnan was good enough to tell me, "You send him to me at Oxford. He can

stay with me." But that plan did not fructify as World War II broke out. His transparent humility and sincerity appeal to me very much and I admire him and love him for these qualities. I did not send him a message of congratulations on his election as President of India — I told him instead that I preferred plain Mr. Radhakrishnan to President Radhakrishnan. Whenever he had a visitor from South India he never failed to make kind enquiries of me and particularly how I was faring at the Ashram. During a visit to Bhagavan, he came to my residence in the company of his dear friend, the late Prof. T. K. Doraiswami Iyer, and his handsome son Dr. Gopal. I then remarked what a handsome son Gopal was. He took it in very good spirit and told his friend who too was well-known to me.

H. H. Maharani of Baroda

H. H. the Maharani Shanti Devi of Baroda came on a visit of two or three hours only on the first occasion and was taken by me to Bhagavan. I went along with her to Ooty and we returned to Tiruvannamalai, and on the second visit she stayed for a week. Naina would come home every night to talk to us on Bhagavan and he endorsed my suggestion that she went round the hill. Her Secretary protested that such a long walk would cause blisters on her feet. Brushing this protest aside, the next day I put this matter to Bhagavan who nodded his approval of the idea and the Maharani left for *pradakshina* on foot, the car following her. She came back with a laugh on her face; having walked the whole distance without any sign of blisters on her feet. The grace of Bhagavan and of Arunachala can work wonders. Her Highness walked around the hill without strain, when a walk of far less distance would have tired her in her palace. Common people on being told that the round is 8 or 9 miles long would give up even the thought of *pradakshina*. But faith can achieve miracles.

Invited to Baroda by Her Highness, I had occasion to see

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in the palace gardens a beautiful white peacock spread out its enchanting tail, which seemed as if it was studded with diamonds. I felt Bhagavan would be delighted with it even as I was and asked if I could take it with me to the ashram. A nice cage was made for it, and when the peacock arrived at the ashram, a fine smile lit up Bhagavan's face and He looked after it with great care.

I had occasion to speak of this peacock to the Maharajah and Maharani of Bhavanagar at Madras and told them of my regret that I did not get any peahens with me. The Maharani had some with her and sent two of them by car to the ashram. Bhagavan was in the Nirvana Room then and when I took the peahens to Him, He took them on His lap and petted them. After Bhagavan's *Mahanirvana* I heard that some wild animals had killed the peahens. It grieved me greatly. I was concerned for the safety of the peacock, which was Bhagavan's favourite. The conditions in the ashram then were such that there was none to care for it and it too disappeared suddenly one day, deepening my grief. It appeared unexpectedly one day on my terrace with its tail outspread and flew away as I ran to catch it. It was not seen at all later. Perhaps it missed the loving care of Bhagavan and deserted the ashram. I used to call this bird 'Madhava' after a very handsome attendant of Bhagavan whom Bhagavan loved and trained in book-binding in such a way that even professionals could envy him. Many stories of this attendant have been told me and that was why I called the peacock after him. Whenever the peacock came and sat at Bhagavan's feet He would say, 'This is my Madhava.'

Shri M. Bhaktavatsalam

I was once asked by Niranjananda Swami to go to Madras and see Shri Bhaktavatsalam, then a Minister in the Government of Madras, and try to arrange for a railway line to be laid from Manamadurai to Virudhunagar via Tiruchuli, the birth-place of Bhagavan. Immediately, I left for Madras

and told Mr. Tarapore of the mission that had brought me to Madras. On hearing it, he just laughed. I requested him to arrange for my meeting Shri Bhaktavatsalam in spite of his misgivings. Shri Tarapore immediately contacted a person who knew Shri Bhaktavatsalam intimately and arranged for me to be taken to the residence of Shri Bhaktavatsalam in Adyar. Receiving me kindly a curious smile spread over his face as he called for his secretary and said, "Mrs. Taleyarkhan here wants a railway line laid via Tiruchuli. Please see how far Tiruchuli is and what are the economics of the route." Then he began to enquire of me and how I came to the ashram. The secretary returned and smilingly said that the cost of the track would be about a crore of rupees. My heart stopped to hear it. I expressed my regret for having come on such a mission but the Minister took pity on me and gave me some hope saying, 'Don't worry, we will see what can be done.' I said I left it to Bhagavan to deal with it. He then took me upstairs to meet his sick wife and his daughter Sarojini. Mrs. Bhaktavatsalam was ill, lying stretched on a stiff surgical bed, with serious trouble in her back. Their kindness and love moved me so much that I took from my handbag some *vibhuti* and applied it to her back and told her not to worry and that she would be well before long. Our friendship thus begun has been an intimate one over the years and no words can adequately thank Shri Bhaktavatsalam and his family for all the kindness, help and assistance I have had from them in the several matters connected with the ashram. When on a visit to Tiruvannamalai I met Shri Bhaktavatsalam at the Sathanur Guest House, he recalled my first visit to him. The railway line to Tiruchuli had been laid and the beautiful station built there was opened to traffic by him. No words are enough to thank him for the help he has rendered for Ramanashram.

Her Highness the Begum of Bhopal

It was by an accident that in 1916 I met H. H. The Dowager

Begum of Bhopal at a party in Bombay. Attracted by my fluent Urdu she asked me to lunch with her the next day where she paid me a great deal of attention; thereafter I was her constant guest not only at lunch but at dinner as well. When she returned to Bhopal, she pressed me to accompany her to Bhopal along with my husband, obliging him to close down the well-circulated *The Parsi* that he was editing to accept the sinecure post of adviser on investments, in Bhopal. There we were allotted the residence named Iron Bungalow, also *Hyait Afza*, the beautiful garden retreat of the Begum. I was constantly in the palace in the company of the Begum who had no daughters but only three fine sons, all of them married to beautiful and charming girls. I had to tell my husband that he was drawing a salary for the work that I was called upon to do. While there the then Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, paid a visit to Bhopal along with Lady Chelmsford and their two daughters. I was introduced to them by Her Highness as her daughter and Lady Chelmsford who took it to be true, enquired about my husband and was disillusioned to learn that I was a daughter only by courtesy or adoption. Lady Chelmsford paid me the compliment of asking me to help her daughters wear the Indian sari the way I was wearing it, so much had she fallen in love with the way I did.

We had occasion to receive at Bhopal a few aristocratic visitors from China, who were so excellently entertained by us that they fell in love with the food served to them; on their return to China they sent the Begum a gift parcel, the contents of which was the cause of a lot of speculation amongst us. To our great surprise we found the parcel to contain jars and jars of pickles of cockroaches and lizards as can be made only in China. The Begum felt thoroughly upset and would not acknowledge it as requested, and wanted the gift parcel thrown out. At my suggestion her second son — known affectionately as General Sab, — and I pacified Her Highness to the extent of sending a short note of acknowledgement without saying whether we appreciated the gift or not. Our

Chinese guests must have taken us for gourmands, so well had we entertained them.

Here in Bhopal was my son Sohrab born. He once fell ill and we had to move him first to Poona and then to Bombay where my husband set up an investment business on his own. Thereafter my relations with the Begum suffered a break.

Shri Jugal Kishore Birla

In 1937 I was in Calcutta with the Yogoda Sat Sangh, where I met Shri Chamiria. I mentioned to him in the course of our conversation that I needed some one to help me build the Self-Realization Centre at Ranchi. He suggested my seeing his friend Seth Jugal Kishore Birla. He got an engagement fixed for me to meet Seth Birla. That day must have been a very lucky day for me. I met a very noble and fine soul in Seth Jugal Kishore Birla. He spoke only Hindi. He enquired about me and asked me what he could do for me. I told him of the excellent work of the Yogoda Sat Sangh at Ranchi and of the dilapidated condition of the building where it was housed and of the need to renovate it. On hearing of Swami Yogananda, he was a bit disappointed and although I assured him that help was not for the Swami but only for the excellent school the Sangh was running at Ranchi, he was not much inclined to grant my request. So I left him, rather dejected. The next day I was surprised to receive his invitation for tea which I reluctantly accepted. He received me very kindly and asked if I felt offended. I told him that a beggar has no right to be offended with anything and that it was entirely in his discretion to render help or refuse it. In view of the keen interest I was evincing in the matter, he said he was reconsidering his refusal of the previous day and inquired if a sum of twenty or twenty five thousand would meet my requirements. I told him I accept no money nor did I have the means to make the necessary renovations, and suggested he could get the work done through his men. At his instance I accompanied him to Ranchi to inspect the

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place. He was delighted not only with the place but with all that he saw in the institution and took a great interest not only in the renovation of the building for which I had approached him but also in the conduct of the institution itself. To my letter of thanks for his munificence, he wrote to me a nice letter expressing his appreciation of the walk of life I had chosen to tread and of his willingness to help me in my endeavours in that direction. That was how our friendship began and it not only ripened with time, but we came to feel that we were not friends merely but brother and sister. I think I must attribute the change in the attitude of Seth Jugal Kishoreji to what my friend Shri Chamiria may have told him of me in the course of the usual walk the two were used to take every morning. His regard for me was so high that I had only to tell Seth Jugal Kishoreji of my needs and he would without a second thought, send me the sum requested. That was how I was able to obtain from him an annual grant of Rs. 1,500 for the Shri Ramanashram *Veda Patasala* as also help other good causes. He sent me Rs. 5,000 for the *kumbhabhishekam* of Shri Patalalinga and when I told him of my intention to bring out a souvenir in connection with that function, he sent me entirely of his own accord without any request emanating from me a sum of Rs. 1,500 to defray the cost of printing it.

Sometime after 1950, on my way back from Mandi I went to Delhi along with my friend Mr. Cohen and called on Seth Jugal Kishoreji — I used to call him Bhayya Jugal Kishoreji — and he received us with great warmth. To my friend — he was ever sceptical—whenever I mentioned the name of Seth Jugal Kishoreji, he praised me very much indeed. I expressed great admiration and appreciation of the wonderful temple of Shri Lakshmi Narayana, Shri Jugal Kishoreji had built in Delhi, when he asked us both to accompany him there the next day. After witnessing the *pujas* at the several shrines in that temple, he took us to the hall in the mandir and over the megaphone spoke to the large assembly of

people there of me, my status and connections with Shri Ramakrishna Mission, Buddha Gaya, The Yogoda Sat Sangh and with Shri Ramana Maharshi and His ashram and praised me to the skies for giving up high society life very early and taking to the life of a sadhu and associating with sages and saints. He asked me to speak of my experiences with the saints and in particular with Shri Ramana Maharshi. In the course of my talk I said that Seth Jugal Kishoreji and the Birla family were what they were that day only because of the large-hearted support rendered in a big way by Bhayya Jugal Kishoreji to worthy causes and that Seth Jugal Kishoreji was a saintly soul, although engaged in the material cares of the world. It was my misfortune that I missed calling on him on my way to Dehra Dun with my nephew and niece to pay our respects to Shri Ma Ananda Mayi. He passed away while I was at Dehra Dun and on my way back, I called on the family to offer my condolences on the passing away of that great and noble soul; and the whole family then assured me that his passing need make no difference in my relations with them and their support would be available in the same measure as when he was alive.

Mr. Paul Brunton

Mr. Paul Brunton, author of the widely known book "A Search for Secret India" had left the ashram before I came here. While we were in the Old Hall one day, Bhagavan told us that the thought of Mr. Brunton came up all of a sudden to Him and then, He remembered that Mr. Brunton would then be addressing the students of some college in Madras and must have referred to Bhagavan in the course of the talk. Whatever differences might have obliged Mr. Brunton to quit the ashram, Bhagavan had a soft corner for him.

Returning to Tiruvannamalai from Bombay I chose once to call on Mrs. Clara Bose at Bangalore to get acquainted with her. Her husband had often been my guest at Bombay but I had not met Mrs. Clara. Sir Mirza Ismail, then

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Dewan of Mysore, came to know I was there and took me home. He had completed the beautiful garden in the Krishna Raja Sagar Dam and wanted me to enjoy it. He also told me that Mr. Paul Brunton was somewhere near there. He arranged for me to be at 'Lake View' at K. R. Sagar Dam and sent his secretary along with me. On our way I called on Mr. Brunton. He had heard of me and knew me by name and also that I was at the ashram. At my invitation he came with us to the dam and in the course of the conversation on a wide range of topics, he said he hoped that I would fare better in my relations with the ashram than he had. He was devoted to Bhagavan and it is well known that it was his book on Bhagavan that made Bhagavan's name known all over the world.

Lady 'K'

Along with Ladies M and T, Lady K stayed a few days at the ashram and I used to tell her stories of Bhagavan and of Arunachala which interested them greatly. One morning M and T came to me in great agitation saying that K — who was rather fat — wanted to go round the hill. In the evening at the ashram when all of us were present, I mentioned to Bhagavan of K's desire to go round the hill, drawing His attention to her physical build as well. Bhagavan said she could do the round of the hill, slowly, and showed how slowly with His fingers placed on His palm. I told K that she had Bhagavan's blessings and could go round the hill, taking care however to see that the car followed her. The three ladies went round the hill and K walked the entire 8 or 9 miles of the *pradakshina* and came to the Hall where Bhagavan received her very graciously and enquired how she had fared in the *pradakshina*. She said that in the company of Naina she did the *pradakshina* quite well without being unduly tired or feeling bodily pain, and to me, in an aside, said that M & T had been obliged to sit in the car midway in the *pradakshina*, which she had done wholly on foot. Years

later — I think it was in 1952 — I went to meet K with some request for help in printing which was granted the moment I made it. I was surprised to see her very much reduced then and told her in fun that she had forgotten me. In all earnestness she replied that my talks with her at nights of Arunachala had made her decide to do the *pradakshina* so that she might become a more normal woman in physical build. In course of time without any effort or discomfort, she slimmed up and was then just like any other normal woman of her age, without that mass of superfluous flesh that had burdened her. How could she forget, she said, the one who was the ultimate cause for such a change? I declined to accept the credit, and said it was Bhagavan's grace that made her to do the *pradakshina* and Shri Arunachala granted the one prayer that was in her mind when she went round. Arunachala always answers your prayers.

A Prince's Query

Among the many Princes of my acquaintance, some I had known intimately would taunt me for giving up the high life I had led in Bombay for the life of a sadhu in an unknown corner of India and my reply to them usually was: each one had to follow the path suited to one, that fed up with the so-called high life I had chosen the 'simple life' and that, were they better acquainted with Bhagavan, such questions would never arise. One among them subsequently wrote to say that he was coming to Tiruvannamalai with the definite object of putting to Bhagavan a series of questions for Him to reply. On his arrival, I took him to the Old Hall and made the necessary introductions to Bhagavan who received the distinguished visitor with His usual grace. Three days we were in the Old Hall without any questions he had come prepared with being put to Bhagavan. When on the third day I asked him why he did not proceed with his plan, he told me that all his questions had been solved without being verbally put to Bhagavan, that I was right in the replies I had

given him while at Ooty; but, would it be possible to meet Bhagavan privately on just one matter that concerned him in a rather personal way? The question of the merger of the princely states was then being seriously considered and there were two sections among the Princes, one for the merger and the other to put up a fight against the proposition. The next day I took him to Bhagavan when Bhagavan was alone and the Prince asked Bhagavan what His advice would be in regard to the question that was agitating him. It is impossible to describe in words the benevolent look cast by Bhagavan at the Prince as He replied: "Whatever is to happen will happen, do not fight." That settled the issue for the Prince and on his return to his State, it had already been decided that the Princes would not fight, but would opt for merger with India. He took it gracefully, as a thing ordained and was reconciled to merger without much regret, and in the full confidence that Bhagavan's advice was for his good, signed the merger deed.

Shri E. V. Ramaswami Naicker

It has been given me, besides being acquainted with the several leaders in the spiritual field and in the Congress, to be also on terms of friendship with leaders of other parties too. I came into contact with Shri Ramaswami Naicker, erstwhile Congressman and founder of the Dravida Kazhagam movement in South India in a strange way. I was rather busy arranging for the reception to Shri Rajaji, then Governor-General, who was to open the Shri Patalalinga Temple. I was at the railway station looking after the arrangements there and noticed a big crowd dressed in black, the uniform of the D.K's, and saw a burly person alight from the train and get into a car. I was told that these people had come to hold the black flag to Shri Rajaji on his arrival. Upset at the information, I caught hold of my informant, Shri P. U. Shanmugham, presently Minister in the Government of Tamil Nadu, and pleaded with him and made him take me to

where Shri Naicker was. There I saw him dressed in black with his flowing white beard and was struck by his personality. He looked like a god to me and I told him so; I told him also why I had come to meet him and what I — a stranger to this part of the country and without a friend or relation here — was trying to do. He was at first rather adamant and said that although Shri Rajaji was his friend, yet, on principle, he had asked his followers to stage the black flag demonstration. Undeterred by the initial failure to make an impression on this leader and firmly set to see that the function went off without any incident to mar the perfection I had planned for it, I took hold of him by his hands and appealed to him movingly, that the function I was organizing might be my last. I even went to the extent of refusing the proffered cup of coffee. Somehow or other he relented on condition that I accepted the cup of coffee. I made him promise to drop the projected demonstration and taking the cup of coffee, offered it to him first and then had my cup and came away. I am happy to say that he kept his word and the reception to Shri Rajaji was not marred by any untoward incident.

Shri Naicker did not forget me. On a visit to Tiruvannamalai after quite a long time, he sent for me saying he would like to meet me. Accompanied by many of his followers I went to the choultry near the Gandhi statue on the Main Road where he received me kindly and introduced me to his followers as the one who made him call off a black flag demonstration. I spent a short time with him in conversation.

Let me say this, it is not my powers of persuasion, if I have any, but it was entirely the grace of Bhagavan that enabled the function of the opening ceremony of the Shri Patalalinga Temple go off very smoothly and Shri Naicker call off the demonstration he had planned. I failed to persuade Shri Naicker to attend the function as he said with finality, 'I never go to temples.'

Mr. J. H. Tarapore

Mr. & Mrs. Tarapore have been already mentioned as the friends who very kindly undertook the construction of the Shri Patalalinga Temple. I had left home and relations sometime in 1937 and had come to Tiruvannamalai. Having burnt my boats I had avoided meeting the members of my community. But I take it, it was the grace of Bhagavan that brought me into contact with this loving and very kind couple who provided me not only a home but became my parents — father and mother — to me by adoption. They had two charming daughters Dina aged 18, and Rhoda aged 8 who would accompany their parents on their frequent trips to Tiruvannamalai in connection with the building of the Patalalinga Temple. Rhoda, the young girl that she was, took considerable pleasure in sitting in front of Bhagavan and with her hands on her chin would watch Bhagavan intently. At home she would ask me several questions regarding Bhagavan and why we all cannot be like Bhagavan. Asked what she meant by 'being like Bhagavan', she said that she meant being so silent, gracious and loving like Him and that she loved Him for that reason. The innocent's love for Bhagavan and the reasons she gave for it were astonishing. The elder daughter too was quite attracted to and loved Bhagavan but she would hardly give expression to it as the younger one did. On 29 May 1951 they were in Ooty when Dina dreamt of Bhagavan, whose *Mahanirvana* caused them no little sorrow. The sky seemed to open up before her in the dream and out of it the beautiful bust of Bhagavan appeared to tell Dina that her wishes had all been fulfilled. She narrated the dream to her mother the next morning but would not tell what the wishes were. On 2 June, on their way to Bangalore from Ooty by car, they met with a grievous accident in which both the daughters lost their lives. This parting caused a great void in my life and it was a great personal loss to me as I loved them deeply and they too had reciprocated my love. The heart-broken mother passed away in 1957 much

to the sorrow of Mr. Tarapore. Seasoned by sorrow at the untimely departure of his beloved ones, Mr. Tarapore is carrying on in the world as one who is in it and yet out of it, helping a very large number of people with work, not being a mere employer but a loving father too. The way he leads his life makes me think he is indeed a saint if ever there be one, considerate, loving and ever ready helping all. May Ramana bless him!

Lady Willingdon

When Lord Willingdon was Governor of Bombay I had a number of occasions to attend parties at the Government House and struck with my theatrical talents and my personality, Lady Willingdon became great friends with me and would ask me to take part in every amateur theatrical staged there. One of her sons was killed in World War I when they were in Bombay but this hardly deterred her from her duties. She attended a charity show at the Empire Theatre, one of the best in Bombay and spotting me on the stage sent for me during the interval. I had not the courage to condole with her in her bereavement but she was gracious enough to ask me to see her at the Government House. When they had to leave for England on the expiry of Lord Willingdon's term as Governor, I met Lady Willingdon in private, and almost wept. I desired her to come back to India. She said that was not possible and that they had finished with India. But he did come back as Governor of Madras and I met Lady Willingdon at the Bangalore Race Course. Seeing me among the crowd, she left her box to come to where I was and told me that my wish had been fulfilled, but that their term at Madras was also drawing to a close and asked me to come and see me at Madras. But again I told her she would be back in India before long, to which she could only say with all love that I must be mad. They did come back, Lord Willingdon as the Viceroy of India. On her arrival in New Delhi she sent me a telegram reading: "Your wish fulfilled.

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Come and meet me." I went to Delhi along with my sister Rita as the guests of Mr. & Mrs. Azecmi, then Consul-General for Persia in India. When we reached their portico, I found them all at the doorstep telling me that there were a number of phone calls for me from Sir Eric Melville, Private Secretary to the Viceroy. Contacted over the phone he told me that Her Excellency was awaiting me. Lady Willingdon came to the phone herself to tell me that my wish for them had again been fulfilled and asked me to go over the next morning as they were scheduled to leave for Sukkur Barrage by noon. She received me and my sister with great warmth and affection and told me in confidence of the intended arrest of a certain eminent person that day. She disregarded the warning of the Private Secretary conveyed by a lift of the eyebrow and told him that she knew I would respect her confidence — so great was her trust in me. She took me around the Viceregal Lodge and asked if she could do anything for me. She granted me the request that the British Government in India would not intervene politically in the affairs of a certain Prince of a North Indian State and a great friend of mine, who had earlier told me that the Government was contemplating certain action against him. Also she helped me to place my sister Rita for training as a nurse in a famous hospital in London — Queen Charlotte Hospital — which was then not open to Indians. I met her thereafter once or twice in Bombay. When they were to leave India finally, I met her privately at the Government House in Bombay along with my son and sisters. She told Sohrab that on the completion of his studies in India he should come to England and that she would arrange for his higher education there. When bidding her farewell I presented her two embroidered cushions requesting them to be used on the voyage. Sometime after reaching England she wrote to tell me that not only did she remember to use the cushions on the voyage but they were still in use with her, even after they had reached home.

Shri Yusuf Meher Ali

One afternoon, Shri Yusuf Meher Ali suddenly came to me while I was at the ashram. He was too ill to come out of the taxi he had come in and said that he wanted the darshan of Bhagavan. At my repeated insistence, the *Sarvadhikari* accommodated him in the Morvi Guest House, then made available only for Princes. After he had had a wash, I got him in the car to the ashram. Much as he wanted to return immediately in the same conveyance, I prevailed upon him to send it away and stay for some days here so that he might be in the presence of Bhagavan for some time at least. He stayed for a fortnight and during that period I saw to it that he got good, nourishing food from my place; I would take him by the hand to the New Hall where Bhagavan would look at him very graciously. In that short period he made an astonishing recovery in health and was able to walk on his own, without help. A number of his close friends, who were preparing for an exhibition in Bangalore to be inaugurated by Shri Meher Ali, came to see him and one among them was a great artist, Shri Okey Raghoji. Shri Meher Ali asked if he would be permitted to make a drawing of Bhagavan, and thanking me for my kindness, asked if he could send me some gift from the exhibition at Bangalore such as saris, curtain cloth etc. I declined his proffered gift and told him if he sent me any, I would return the same and asked only to be remembered with love. A few days later, I got a letter from him saying that he was sending me a parcel and challenged me to return it, as threatened. I was delighted and surprised on opening the parcel to find therein two excellent pencil sketches of Bhagavan. So life-like were they that I was astonished beyond measure to know how the artist could have drawn them from the corner where he had his seat in the New Hall. I took them immediately to Bhagavan who was greatly pleased with them both and showed them to all in the Hall, recounting the circumstances of the visit of Shri Yusuf Meher Ali that led to the drawing of the pictures and handed them

back to me. One of them I gave to Shri Mouni, then working as the *Sarvadhikari*'s hard working secretary. I am sorry now I am unable to trace where this picture is, while the other one is among my most prized possessions. In the trials and tribulations that beset me after Bhagavan's *Mahanirvana* this picture has been a source of great consolation to me. I have often seen Bhagavan laugh, smile or weep out of this picture at me when I was depressed or feeling sore.

The present generation may know little of Shri Yusuf Meher Ali, who in the thirties of this century formed, along with Shri Achyut Patwardhan and Shri Jaya Prakash Narayan, the vanguard of the Congress Socialist Party. He would have made a great leader of India had not death claimed him all too early. Bhagavan's immense solicitude for him is worth remembering. When I led Shri Meher Ali to the New Hall and made him sit on the floor, Bhagavan beckoned to me and asked me to make him sit near the pillar so that he might lean against it, in view of his rather poor health.

Sceptics may laugh at me for what I have said of this picture, but they are wrong. Let me recount another instance. An Englishman, greatly devoted to Bhagavan, told Bhagavan when He was in the Old Hall that he had a picture of Bhagavan on his prayer table and that he was rather puzzled to see that picture in several changing moods, sometimes angry, sometimes smiling and sometimes mellow, and enquired if it was only a mental hallucination on his part. At first Bhagavan simply smiled as was usual, but when persisted in, Bhagavan told him in English: "Why do you think it is a picture?" Instances can be multiplied but seems unnecessary as it must be within the experience of other devotees as well.

XVIII

FRIENDS

AG—Shri N. Balaram Reddy—A boy from Holland—Major A. W. Chadwick—Shri Devaraja Mudaliar—Major Farrington—Miss E. G. Merston—Shri Naina—Shri R. Narayana Iyer—Peter X—Rangaswami—Dr. & Mrs. K. K. Syeed.

AG

I had often to go to Madras in connection with the affairs of the ashram. On one such visit I had a telephonic message from Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami saying that two ladies from England wanted to see me. I asked that they might be directed to meet me at the Tarapore's and was astonished and bewitched with the beauty of the daughter who accompanied her mother when they came to me. They told me that a friend had asked them to see me and wanted to be my guests at the ashram. I told them I was detained on business at Madras, but that my residence at Tiruvannamalai was available to them and they would be comfortable there, even in my absence. They left for Tiruvannamalai that day and I too returned two days later. The mother took an opportunity for a quiet and private conversation with me regarding her daughter, over whom she was upset and asked me to keep it secret from her daughter. A very beautiful Indian girl, H, the daughter of dear friends of mine, who was then with me was not in a dissimilar position. After dinner that night, I referred to the plight of this girl and then the daughter — I call her AG — of her own accord said that she was in the same boat as H and told me her story. She had been engaged to an aristocrat in England who was convicted for some offence for a year. She left for the States and there

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met an Indian Muslim who after a time proposed to her and was accepted. She then heard that he was already married and had a wife living, and if she married him she may have to observe purdah as Muslims do. A little later she returned to England where, due to her worries, she developed rashes, for which they consulted an Indian homoeopath. In the room of this homoeopath was a photo of Bhagavan which attracted the mother's attention and made her enquire who and what He was. She heard the story of Bhagavan from the homoeopath and wished that it might be possible for her to visit His ashram and prayed to Him to solve her daughter's problem. The parents then left for Ceylon but the daughter, although anxious to accompany them, could not. At a dinner to which she reluctantly accompanied her parents before their departure for Ceylon, the gentleman sitting next to her remarked on her reticence and inquired the cause. He then asked her to meet him at the address in the card he gave her. She got a job of an air hostess and so came to Madras where her mother had come from Ceylon. That was how mother and daughter came to Madras and met me. I told AG that it was not wise to proceed further with the engagement. I would leave it to Bhagavan to find a solution for her problem. That evening we went to the ashram and sat near Bhagavan's *samadhi* — then just a shed, as the present one had not yet been built. I insisted on her praying to Bhagavan for guidance if it would conduce to her happiness to proceed with her engagement. I told her she would meet a wonderful man of her own nationality and not to worry. She did so a little reluctantly of course, and during the days she was here, would talk to me and other devotees of Bhagavan. They left on a tour of Jaipur, Agra, Delhi and Bombay with letters from me and then for England. AG was a bit angry with me and neither wrote nor acknowledged my letters. Some time after, AG wrote to tell me that what I had wished for had happened, that before getting engaged, she would like to have my blessings and good wishes. I congratulated her and told

her what mattered was not my blessings or good wishes, but the blessings of Bhagavan, to whom she had prayed that day, at my insistence even if reluctantly. I understand she has now become an ideal mother also. She has also won fame as an author of repute.

Shri N. Balaram Reddy

The scion of a noble and affluent family of the Andhras, Balaram Reddy studied law, and enrolled as an advocate but so great were his spiritual aspirations, that he joined the Shri Aurobindo Ashram at Pondicherry very early in life. He studied very diligently the works of the two saints there, Shri Aurobindo and the Mother, and had several experiences while there. He was at Pondicherry for over seven years and feeling an urge for the darshan of Bhagavan, came to Ramanashram and was so drawn to it that he made it his home thereafter. Bhagavan was gracious and very kind to him realizing that one who had been accustomed to lead a very comfortable life, had chosen to live in a hut with all its attendant discomforts. Bhagavan trusted him to translate His replies faithfully and convey the exact purport of what Bhagavan said. Since my coming to the ashram, he has been a very sincere friend of mine helping to smoothen my difficulties with the ashram. He proved his greatness and sincerity when I had planned to build a guest house for the ashram but was foiled by a few of the residents. In 1956 I thought it would help Venkataraman if he made a tour and visited other places. It was a task for me to persuade Balaram — he had been, as now, leading a life of a recluse keeping to himself and rarely visiting any one — to accompany me, the ashram Manager Venkataraman and Hansa the daughter of my friend on a tour of North India to several ashrams there, just in order to show Venkataraman how ideally our ashram too could be managed. The tour lasted nearly four months from October 1956 till January 1957 and we visited 26 places. At all these places we were the guests of dear friends of mine who

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were kind and hospitable and helped us greatly in the task we had in view. Personally, Venkataraman and his family have reason to be grateful to Shri Balaram for the help, financial and other, he has rendered them in their need. After Bhagavan's *Mahasamadhi*, Balaram gave up his residence in the ashram. But his devotion to Bhagavan is undiminished.

A boy from Holland

A young man hailing from Holland came to me with a letter from dear Ananta from Shri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, asking me if he could stay with me for two days. After two days he said he was much impressed by this place and the love he was receiving from us, and asked if he could stay a few days more. I told him to stay as long as he liked. He was much moved, so he told me the very sad story of his childhood. His mother, a great society lady, had no time for her only child. A nurse used to look after him. At the age of 10 he was put as a boarder in a good school. Meanwhile, his mother got divorced and married again. This news made him most unhappy. Neither father nor mother cared for him. He was disconsolate and miserable. Suddenly at the age of 17 he ran away to England and approached the head of a Motor Company. The owner was their family friend. He took up the job at the Factory, gathered a good amount and came to India in search of Spiritual Peace. At Pondicherry he spent all his money and lacked the means to get back to his country. I told him of Bhagavan. If he would have faith in Him, He would surely help. He continued to stay with me. One morning he told me that the previous night a wonderful thing had happened. He saw a bright torch light thrown on the wall, so he slowly turned round and what he saw was Bhagavan in his room smiling at him with His walking stick and *kamandalu*.

Later one day I suggested that he should visit the local Danish Mission people, which he did rather reluctantly one

afternoon. They recognized him as the son of a wealthy magnate of their country and they offered him tea and invited him for the lunch with them the next day. When they learnt his sorrowful plight they on their own contacted their embassy in New Delhi, and arranged for his repatriation by air to his country.

He was overjoyed and said to me, "You have given me the greatest wealth, *the love* for which I was hungry from childhood, *love* and *guidance* and shown the faith in Spiritual Path. *Will I ever forget you, Ma?*" Some weeks after reaching home, he wrote to me a nice letter of thanks and told me that Bhagavan had indeed been kind to him in his trials of his early unhappy life at home. *Love Conquers Everything*. I have had any number of such loving letters.

Major A. W. Chadwick

Major Chadwick's life as a sadhu and his earlier life have been too well told by him in his book to need recounting here. He was a source of immense strength to the ashram both when Bhagavan was in the body and for long afterwards. Due to some misunderstanding between him and the ashram management, he wrote to me at Ooty that he was leaving the ashram and would not wait for my return. He visited Banaras and other places. After a while he came back to Tiruvannamalai and building himself a cottage in the compound of Shri R. Narayana Iyer, the sub-registrar, settled down near the ashram. Subsequently he moved into the cottage that he had earlier built within the ashram itself where he remained till his last days.

I requested Major Chadwick to take charge of the *Veda Patasala* as he did of the *Shri Chakra Pujas*, and this he did until his passing away in 1962. He evinced a paternal interest in the welfare of the boys under his care and saw to it that besides the training they received in the Vedas they received a good education in English, Tamil and Arithmetic such as would fit them for life in the modern days. Every

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year during their annual vacation in January at the time of the Pongal festival, he had arranged that the boys in the care of their teacher be taken out to several places of pilgrimage and thus the boys had occasion to see Tiruchuli, Madurai, Srirangam, Tirupathi, Kalahasti, Tiruttani and Sholinghur among other pilgrim centres. With his passing, the number of boys in the *Patasala* has gone down, and their education in the other subjects too suffered, sometimes grievously. They do not now have the annual camping that they enjoyed when he was in charge.

He evinced a great interest in the welfare of Krishnamurti and Subramanyam who had been students of the *Patasala* and continued to serve the ashram thereafter as the priests officiating at the shrine in the ashram. He was responsible for getting the former a residence near the ashram that originally belonged to Shri K. Ramachandra, Editor of the "Religious Digest" issued from Ceylon, and a devotee of Bhagavan, and for the latter, obtained as gift a plot of land from one of the devotees of Bhagavan, Dr. A. M. Patel of Bombay, and on this plot Subramanyam has built a cottage for himself. Both the houses of Rithu and Appuchi are electrified. Besides these two he helped a number of devotees, for whom he had a soft corner. He took up the work of *samadhi* construction but for the reasons I leave the reader to guess, he had to give it up.

He fell ill of jaundice and as treatment locally did not yield results, we had to remove him to Vellore for admission to the Christian Mission Hospital. Hugo Maier and I had accompanied him and we stayed with him and attended on him. However, he was not to be with us long and he passed away at that hospital and was brought to the ashram and buried near his own cottage. In his last moments we were at his bedside and then he called me and told me that a figure in white was standing in the corner of his room, beckoning to him. Hugo thought that he might be mistaking the bottle of glucose injection that was hung up there and

said so. He then turned round to me and said: "Look Mother, what he is saying. That person is wanting to shake hands with me and is extending his hands to me. Look, he is calling me." His breathing which was hard until then, became soft and normal and his countenance too became soft and beautiful; at a quarter to four in the morning on 17-4-1962 he breathed his last. From the description he gave of the figure in white that he saw, we inferred that it was Christ come to receive him in his last moments. He was greatly devoted to Bhagavan, yet Jesus Christ came forward to receive him at the moment of leaving the mortal coil. May he be at peace!

Few know that he had in his room a small idol of Lord Dakshinamurti and a Shri Chakra consecrated by the holy touch of Bhagavan to both of which he offered worship in his own way every morning. Dressed in white with the sacred ash on his forehead, he made a picture sitting at the *samadhi* of Bhagavan when the *Vedaparayana* went on morning and evening to justify the Indian name he had adopted — Sadhu Arunachala.

Shri Devaraja Mudaliar

As the author of three books, "Day by Day with Bhagavan," "Gems from Bhagavan," and his own "Recollections of Bhagavan," Shri Mudaliar has made a mark. We are good friends and drew closer to each other as the years passed. With all my great affection for him, I consider him a rather dangerous person, as he could never be expected to keep anything confidential. He would reveal it to the next person he met on his way — so frank, sincere and clean is he. He was quite uninhibited with Bhagavan even as a child. One day he remarked: "Bhagavan, what have you done for me?" when Bhagavan turning His kindly gaze on him replied, "Oh, Oh, with a veritable flood around, one seeks water. Is that not so with you?" All of us in the hall burst out laughing. He along with Shri Balaram Reddy acted as translators to Bhagavan

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whenever any one put questions to Bhagavan in English. Bhagavan would turn to either of them to translate His reply. Morning and evening Devaraja would recite in Bhagavan's presence and after His *Mahasamadhi*, at His shrine, songs written by Bhagavan or from other literature like *Thevaram* and *Tiruppugazh*. He put me once in an awkward situation when in the Old Hall he told Bhagavan that Taleyarkhan did not exploit Bhagavan though she had Ramana round her little finger. He meant that I had only to ask for Bhagavan to grant my least wish, but that I was silly that I never took advantage of it. Shocked, I cried out: "Bhagavan, he must be mad. I would not ask anything of Bhagavan. I know that Bhagavan knows what is best and will always grant what one needs." Bhagavan said in Tamil, 'sari' (yes!) expressing his approval of my statement. He left the ashram recently and is with his daughter at Kancheepuram. Such real devotees go away one by one. It is a great misfortune.

Major Farrington

Major Farrington met with an accident in World War II when his jeep collided with a train. He had to be hospitalised with serious injuries all over his body. Most of the time in the hospital he was under the influence of drugs to keep down the pain. During one period of wakefulness he felt that he was looking at his own body from above his bed and Jesus Christ was standing near his body telling him that he would recover. Major General Bhatia, the doctor-in-charge, felt that his was too serious a case to be treated in India and sent him to England where several parts of his body were put in plaster for nearly three years. Even in England he had visions of Jesus Christ while in hospital. He came to India on the passing of Mrs. Bhatia to condole with Major General Bhatia and accompanied him to the ashram when the latter came at my request to examine Bhagavan, then seriously ill with sarcoma. Bhagavan was in the *nirvana* room and asked Major Farrington to be seated and he took a seat near

Bhagavan. He was looking at Bhagavan and thinking why people call him Bhagavan, which means God and what was the difference between Bhagavan and Jesus. Then he saw Bhagavan as Jesus and was at first incredulous. He rubbed his eyes to look again to assure himself that he was not dreaming. The vision persisted until he was quite convinced of what he saw. That night before retiring to bed he and Major General Bhatia were my guests. He told me of this vision of his and asked me to believe that he was not in the least hysterical or given to spinning stories. He left India by boat and on the high seas while sitting on the deck, he had again a vision of Bhagavan walking on the waters even as Jesus had done; he immediately made a note of the date and time of this vision in his diary. His girl friend met him at Southampton and had with her a copy of the "London Times" which he looked into, to find a report of the *Mahasamadhi* of Bhagavan. He found that the time he had the vision of Bhagavan walking on the high seas while he was on board the ship was the time when Bhagavan attained *Mahasamadhi*. That was indeed a wonderful coincidence.

Miss E. G. Merston

Miss Elizabeth Merston's life would fill a volume, which, much as I urged her to, she would never write. The child of affluent parents, she lacked the love of the mother in childhood, as the mother, a society lady, had left the care of the infant to a governess. This lack affected her entire life. On the death of her mother, she accepted the post of a companion to a crippled lady without her father's knowledge and successively became a guide at art exhibitions, a tourist guide in England, and later, on the Continent. In the course of her tours she picked up considerable knowledge of the different countries and could speak some of the European languages. Being spiritually minded she fell in with Gurdjeiff, Rudolf Steiner and also Shri J. Krishnamurti. She had gone round the world several times and had friends amongst all kinds of

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people all over the world. She heard of India and came to Banaras where she took up residence in some village nearby to become the self-appointed friend, philosopher, medical woman and arbitrator to the village folk there, helping to settle their quarrels and avoid bad blood and waste of money in fruitless litigation. Hearing of Bhagavan she came to Tiruvannamalai and became an ardent devotee of Bhagavan and my good friend. This friendship lasted for life. She would at first spend only the winter months here, but later settled down here in a cottage built for herself. Before coming to India, after the death of her father she had packed her all, not inconsiderable, worldly goods and left them in the care of M/s. Thomas Cook. In 1939 she heard that the warehouse in which her goods had been stored had been completely bombed out and this information she carried to Bhagavan who heard it with His usual 'Hm.' Some time later to her pleasurable surprise she heard that the portion of that warehouse where her goods had been stored was alone saved while the rest of it had been destroyed. She was much concerned with the slow progress of the *samadhi* work and when the ashram trustees asked her she said she would have done the work quite efficiently and wonderfully too, with all her experience and knowledge. But she made it a condition that she should be given the sole charge of the work without let or interference from any one. This was not possible. The last few years saw her fall ill of cancer. A specialist advised that it be removed by an operation, giving her six months if it was not. She declined to be operated on, patiently bore her illness for nearly three years during which period Miss Nartaki her neighbour nursed her with loving care. After my mother passed away in February 1967, I had to go to Bombay as my nephew was ill and when taking leave of her, she told me she had depended on me to ease her out of this life. But as I had prior claims on my attention, she bade me good-bye. She passed away on 19th March 1967 while I was in Bombay and by her death I miss a sincere, life-long friend as also

a devotee who had great love for Bhagavan. These days thoughts of her are uppermost in my mind especially when I need an honest, upright and straightforward friend.

Shri Naina

Professor Mungala Venkataramayya is the well-known editor of the popular book "Talks with Shri Ramana Maharshi" and was affectionately called Naina. I had the good fortune to meet him even on the first occasion I came to Bhagavan to take His blessings for my scheme of the Home of Devotion, when I stayed for only a few days. Later when I came to give fight to Bhagavan for having misled me, as I thought, over that scheme, I came into closer contact with Naina. This developed into friendship in the course of time. I used to refer my friends to him for enlightenment on Bhagavan's philosophy. He was a constant visitor to my residence whether in Bose Compound or in the house I later built and did much to smoothen my relationship with the ashram management. He somehow persuaded me to continue to reside here, whenever I felt like leaving in disgust. After Bhagavan's *Mahasamadhi*, Naina took to *sanyas* and was known as Shri Ramananda Saraswathi, more familiarly as Mungala Swami. He took up permanent abode in the ashram in 1960. All his children are ardent devotees of Bhagavan. When Naina, who now was nearly 80, fell seriously ill, and had to be rushed to the Christian Mission Hospital, Vellore, it was I who took him there. Then his children also came there. He passed away there. He was brought to Tiruvannamalai and buried in the compound of the house his daughter Kamakshi had built. His children were profuse in the expression of their indebtedness to me for the way I had attended on their father in his last days. But such is human nature, that they could not find time to visit me later. Previously they would never fail to call on me whenever they were here. They had not the courtesy to send me a bare

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line when my mother died. Such are the many experiences I have had here.

Shri R. Narayana Iyer

Recipient in a particularly large measure of the grace of Bhagavan among His numerous devotees is Shri R. Narayana Iyer, a retired sub-registrar now living in the vicinity of the ashram. Perhaps because Shri Narayana Iyer from his first meeting with Him stubbornly refused to consider Bhagavan as a mere man. He fell a victim to Bhagavan's charm and remained an ardent devotee. I am not competent to speak of his numerous experiences with Bhagavan. I hope Shri Narayana Iyer himself will set them down for the delectation of posterity. Two incidents stand out particularly in my memory. I had arranged for the exhibition of a film made up of a few shots of the life of Bhagavan to be shown in the Old Hall. The projection apparatus and the film were the gift of Mr. Raja Reddy. The time for the show was settled for 7 p.m. by the *Sarvadhikari*. When I told Bhagavan, Bhagavan remarked that Shri Narayana Iyer, then on duty at Polur would not be in a position to reach the ashram in time. He used to visit the ashram every day in the evening and return to Polur about 20 miles from the ashram. The *Sarvadhikari* would not change the timing. I was in a dilemma as Bhagavan had said that the show could go on but that He would not be there. However the situation resolved itself since Shri Narayana Iyer came to the ashram rather early that day and the show went on as scheduled.

When Shri Narayana Iyer dug a well in the compound of his house Bhagavan evinced keen interest in its day to day progress. When water was first struck in that well, Narayana Iyer got some of it to Bhagavan, who tasted it and declared that the water was good and sweet. I can vouch for it as a matter of my personal experience that while the wells in the vicinity would dry up in the hot season, this particular one always had plenty of water. I believe it is so because of Bhagavan's grace.

Peter X

Owner of a prosperous curio shop in England, some troubles caused Peter such severe mental strain that he was advised a sea voyage. He came from Colombo for a short stay here, having been recommended to call at the Ramanashram. He could not sleep without drugs and they too acted tardily as he had become immune to them. Sympathizing with his lot, I just told him that he would sleep that night without drugs. So he did, the drugs having been removed to a safe place by a sympathetic neighbour. So sound was his sleep that night, that he had to be awakened from bed the next morning. He felt that it was the grace of Bhagavan, of whom he knew next to nothing then, that was responsible for the change in him and decided to prolong his stay until he was obliged to return to England on urgent private affairs. Settling up these affairs that took him to England, he came back and was my neighbour, regular in his visits to the Old Hall for meditation. He told me that he derived immense benefit not only from the time he spent in the Old Hall but also from a perusal of the literature concerning Bhagavan. After nearly a year here, he fell ill rather seriously and had to go back to England. I learn he is now quite well and that he plans to go over and settle down here, after setting up his only son in life. May Bhagavan grant his wish!

Rangaswami

Several persons have served Bhagavan as his attendants some time or other. Among them all, as far as I know, Rangaswami was most careful and discerning. He served Bhagavan for a number of years. I called him Nandi, having regard to his dark skin, his short stature, and the fact that almost always he could be seen standing behind Bhagavan. I was at dinner one evening at my residence when he came running from the ashram to tell me that Bhagavan was likely to leave us soon. I asked him why. He told me that it was his turn that day to attend on Bhagavan and as he was massaging the arm that

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had been operated upon for cancer, Bhagavan had very graciously smiled upon him and told him that He, Bhagavan, had given them all a lot of trouble but that the trouble would end in two or three days. Bhagavan had also said that there was no equivalent in Tamil for the English words 'Thank you very much' except 'Romba Santhosham' and that Bhagavan felt much obliged for the loving and kind attention they had all paid Him. Bhagavan said further that His attendants might be at peace afterwards. They might be in difficulty about food and might not continue in the ashram either. Bhagavan dropped His physical frame within three days of this and of His attendants only one, Satyananda, continues to be at the ashram while the rest have been either forced out or have left of their own accord. How true have been Bhagavan's words!

Dr. & Mrs. K. Syeed

Dr. Syeed, who for some time had been a professor in the University of Allahabad, was a staunch devotee of Bhagavan, despite the vehement protests of Mrs. Syeed, a staunch Muslim. She even threatened to divorce her husband should he persist in his visits to Bhagavan. They had only one daughter who had appeared for the Matriculation examination and afterwards contracted enteric fever, and passed away leaving her parents disconsolate. As is not unusual with people in such a state, Dr. Syeed came to Bhagavan and took up residence in Pilakothu, adjoining the ashram. He too fell ill seriously and Mrs. Syeed was sent for, despite his protests. He recovered gradually and when he was able to walk about, told Mrs. Syeed that he was going to the Old Hall, when Mrs. Syeed warned him to be careful of what happened to him there. All the time she was there with her husband she had not entered the ashram at all and was only in Pilakothu. Two or three days later, she, of her own accord, accompanied her husband to the Old Hall, with the Koran bound in red cloth tucked under her arm pit, made a

short bow to Bhagavan and proceeded immediately to sit near the distant window to read the Koran, as if to ward off pollution — so orthodox was she. The mellifluous voice of Bhagavan would often distract her attention from the Koran and cause her to look up. The subsequent two or three days she came to the Old Hall and then one morning, telling her husband that she was going to the bazaar, she got therefrom some fine piece of khaddar out of which she made an upper cloth, towel and pillow covers, embroidered them and offered them to Bhagavan in the Old Hall. Bhagavan expressed His appreciation of the excellent needle-work — Mrs. Syeed was a capable needle woman — and these articles were brought into use. The deep grief the woe-begone mother had felt at the death of her only daughter gave place to relief. Indeed a feeling that the departed daughter had not left her at all but was with her in her heart came over Mrs. Syeed in the presence of Bhagavan. At the time of their departure she made a deep low bow to Bhagavan and left for their home in Allahabad. Bhagavan appeared to her thrice in dream there but she saw only the bust of Bhagavan and not Bhagavan in full height. Thereafter the couple came to Bhagavan on two or three occasions. Mrs. Syeed had been accustomed to visit a learned Maulvi in Lucknow. Coming to know of her visits to Bhagavan he reprimanded her for being a renegade. But even after this the couple came to Bhagavan once. Mrs. Syeed however was troubled in mind because of her experience in the presence of Bhagavan and because the Maulvi had reprimanded her notwithstanding the beneficent effect Bhagavan's mere darshan had brought on her. On their return, the Maulvi informed Mrs. Syeed that they were planning a trip to Mecca. Would she care to join? The journey would cost about Rs. 2,000, she was told. While at dinner, she told her husband of this. Surprisingly enough, he provided the funds for her journey. Reaching Mecca, she sat for three nights consecutively at the Karbala with this one prayer to find an answer for the question that

was disturbing her — whether she had been right in visiting Bhagavan. The first two nights gave her no reply and the third night she began her prayers in a somewhat dejected mood. In the small hours of the morning, to her intense delight, a musical voice said thrice, in rising crescendo: 'What is here is there', 'What is here is there.' That settled her doubts once and for all and she returned to India very happy.

Mrs. Syeed told me about this incident in her chaste Urdu and sweet voice that night when a cobra appeared behind my back to the astonishment of both Mrs. Syeed and Soona as has been related elsewhere. The Syeeds had then built a cottage for themselves in the grounds where we now have the Sathanur Guest House. She told me that Bhagavan had appeared to her thrice when they were in that cottage while she was at Namaaz early in the morning. At my request this cottage is still preserved in the grounds of that Guest House.

In our Old Hall sometimes after three o'clock lots of interesting talks, music performances and so many other things used to take place. One day some talk on Bhakti came—Bhagavan spoke a lot on this subject. Then suddenly one devotee Subrahmanya, a lawyer by profession, came and settled down at the ashram after his wife's death. He used to tell wonderful stories—one of them was this which appealed to me the most.

In some place one day a big sadhu walked in. Some people followed him. He came and sat down under a tree. Now people started gathering round him. Swamiji started telling them stories and instructed them about the *sadhana*s and so on. Amongst them one man became so attached to Swamiji that he did not care for anything but for Swamiji's comforts, food and so on. Swamiji would not eat food. So this fellow got so anxious and upset and asked Swamiji, "What shall I do? If you take milk I will get you." Swamiji asked, "Where can you get milk from?" He said that was not his business. Immediately he left and started begging for money and in a short time bought a

cow. Those other devotees told Swamiji, "This fellow is a useless one. He does not care to hear such wonderful discourse of yours and the whole day he is doing some thing or the other." Swamiji said, "You leave him alone. Let him do whatever he likes and you do whatever you like." One day a big procession with music and band was passing, when this man was grinding some medicine for Swamiji who strangely enough had some disease suddenly spread on his face and body. This fellow got very miserable and asked what he should do. Swamiji told him, "You cannot do anything because the wonderful medicine is on a mountain where you will not be able to go. If you get that you have to grind that in milk and daily at night apply the thing when the disease will disappear." He went and brought the grass which he was grinding when this procession was passing. Those other devotees said to him, "You mad fellow, God is passing, can you not see?" He said, "You see my God is this. I do not care for any other thing." In heaven Indra, Vishnu and all others got surprised and tried their best to induce him by saying that they could give him better grace and so on, but he said, "I want nothing from any of you. I am only devoted to my Swami." Daily in the night he will sit for hours and with such love apply on his beloved Swamiji the medicine. Some days passed. One early morning he woke up to prepare the things for the Swamiji when he saw Lord Siva sitting there with tiger skin wrapped round Him and a big beautiful snake on His head. This fellow got stunned. So Lord Siva called him and said, "This is real Bhakti and devotion you have shown. I am very pleased. Now enter into me." So he disappeared in his body. Every one in the Hall was very delighted. So Bhagavan said only such devotion can make one a real *Sadhaka*.

Mr. K. R. Venkata Subrahmanya Iyer was a great devotee of Bhagavan. He first heard of Bhagavan at Calcutta in 1915 from Brahmanaswami. When his wife passed away in 1918, he became a *Vairagi* and came to Bhagavan. In

those days Bhagavan was having *Bhiksha* brought to Him by devout devotees. Seeing this Venkata Iyer decided that they should have their own kitchen and cooking. So one fine morning he brought rice, dhal and all necessary things and told Bhagavan that no more food will come from outside. It will be cooked here and requested Bhagavan's mother that hereafter food will have to be prepared. That is how the first time cooking started at Skandashram and Bhagavan and all devotees ate together. He was also the first one who started contributing Rs. 25 per month regularly till he died and this practice was followed by other devotees also.

It was only Mr. Venkata Iyer who in 1931-32 started the *Veda Parayana*, chanting Vedas mornings and evenings—the Upanishads in the mornings and *Rudra Japam* in the evenings.

XIX

ARTIST FRIENDS

Isadora Duncan—Madame Pavlova—Shakespeare Group—
Musicians—M. S. Subbulakshmi—A Court Musician.

Isadora Duncan

My husband and Mr. Naval Gandhi were pioneers of the cinema industry in India. They had brought out a few pictures like Tagore's *The Sacrifice*. *Sacrifice* was the first Indian film to be exhibited in England and was highly appreciated. *Devdasi* and *Toll of Destiny* were among their other productions. For the shooting of the latter picture we had to go to Hampi in South India. It is a place of great historical importance. Its ruins attract many visitors even today. It is situated on the banks of the mighty river Thungabhadra. We were a party of 60 actors, actresses and other help, and had occupied the Travellers' Bungalow. While out shooting one morning, two ladies arrived in a cart. They came to me and asked if they could stay with us as they had no place where they could stay, since we were in occupation of the Travellers' Bungalow. One of them was deeply interested in the production we had on hand and would join us and be with us from early morning till late at night on the sets. But I neither knew nor was curious to know who she was. She was thrilled to see me go about the work of directing the production and once or twice told me she would like to take me along with her as I had the makings of a good director. She loved the Indian food we served and spent a considerable time with us enjoying our company. Instead of the two days

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she had originally planned to stay at Hampi she spent nearly ten days along with her friend. On the day she had set for her departure, this lady woke me up from my bed at 4 a.m. to say good-bye to me. She embraced me and kissed me and introduced herself, saying that she was the great dancer Isadora Duncan and that was the reason for the great interest she evinced in me while at the sets. She left her card with me and invited me to be her guest in Europe. My husband and Mr. Naval Gandhi were very much excited to know that the lady who had been our guest these few days was the great dancer and took me to task for not waking them up and introducing them also to her. She passed away in 1928.

Madame Pavlova

I happened to meet Madame Pavlova, the great Russian dancer when she came to India. She too became very fond of me so much so that during the time she was in Bombay I had always to be in her company. When I gave her a dinner party at the Taj Hotel in Bombay, she arranged for a movie of that party to be taken for exhibition in Europe.

Shakespeare Group

I met also the Shakespearean Waring Company in similar circumstances and was in their company all the time they were in Bombay, producing the several plays of Shakespeare.

Musicians

Thus I met many distinguished dancers and actors in Bombay. It was my good fortune also to meet, know and entertain several famous musicians — Chorjan, Malkajan, Juddonbai and a few others who would give recitals at my residence and which taught me the appreciation of Indian music. I was their confidante and knew intimately their joys and sorrows in life, and their loves and disappointments.

M. S. Subbulakshmi

In life we sometimes meet utter strangers, yet feel an intense attraction for each other and at that moment become one and a strong intimate friendship springs up in the twinkling of an eye. This was what happened when I met the Nightingale of India, Shrimati M. S. Subbulakshmi, and her dear husband Shri Sadasivam. The great love that sprang up at our first meeting has been fostered by time and the warmth of our friendship is just as fresh as ever. I will be failing in my duty if I did not express it but kept it within me that they are always willing to comply with any request I may make to them.

To build the *samadhi* and hall of Lord Bhagavan Shri Ramana Maharshi, I requested them to help me raise a fund of Rs. 1,50,000 and they readily agreed. Friends at Madras advised the formation of a committee for the specific purpose of building the *samadhi* and the hall and for the opening of a bank account in the name of the committee. I consulted Venkataraman on this suggestion, although I knew what his reaction would be. He declined to entertain the idea of a separate and independent committee for the purpose and therefore the idea had to be dropped.

Later, interesting myself in the work of raising funds for the construction of Shree Shri Ananda Mayi Hospital at Banaras, I approached these good friends of mine for help which was given readily. When they were at Delhi, I took them along with their friends for the darshan of Shri Ma, then at Brindavan. As our party entered, Shri Ma, who was just coming out, welcomed us all very graciously and asked me whether "M.S." would sing; she did and with such divine fervour and intense emotion that tears welled up spontaneously in her eyes. She sang for quite a long time to the great delight of the audience and of Shri Ma too. Subbulakshmi while singing looked so beautiful, like Mira herself. The gathering dispersed and Shri Ma had very graciously arranged for our party to be seated for lunch on the verandah near the

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room She was occupying. We had sat down when Shri Ma came along and going into Her room, came out with a box full of nuts and fruits from which She served us all excellent fruits and nuts with Her own hand, much to the joy not only of the members of our party but of Her entourage as well. The party was to leave immediately after lunch for darshan of the Lord in the temple at Brindavan, when Shri Ma distributed clothes to the members of the party; then, suddenly, calling Shri Sadasivam to Her side, She took a sari cloth from under Her seat and wound it round his head saying as She did so 'This is from Siva.' Deeply touched at Shri Ma's graciousness and love, the happy couple prostrated to her and took leave of her. "M.S." gave a concert in aid of the Hospital fund at the Birla House, Bombay, on 1st December, 1967, the details of which have been mentioned elsewhere.

A Court Musician

The Prince of a certain native state in India once sent me a person with a letter asking me to place his case before Bhagavan. This person who knew only Hindi asked me to seek Bhagavan's grace for him. I shall set out the background of this. The person was a musician at the court of the Prince and was also tutor to the children of the Prince. He was a devotee of Goddess Durga, and during the *Durga Puja* he would avail himself of the holidays to celebrate the festival on a grand scale with all the resources placed at his disposal by the Prince. One night he had a dream. A grave sage-like person dressed all in white and with a white beard appeared to him in the dream and even while he was aware that his body was lying in the bed, took him by the hand and led him that night to the moon and on the succeeding nights from one planet to another and then to another until in company with this sage he had visited all the planets. The night after all these visits were completed, he was again led by the hand by this sage through regions which alternately were pitch dark and full of light over a vast distance, and at last they arrived

at the gates of a palace of gold where the gatekeepers recognized the sage, and permitted them to enter. Mother Parvathi and Lord Siva were seated on the throne in a vast hall, on entry into which Mother Parvathi told Lord Siva that the musician was Her devotee and told the musician that She was always with him and would protect him, but that he must keep it a close secret. Should he reveal it, She would give him up thereafter, for ever. To cut the long story short his performance acquired a divine character and his *pujas* attracted large crowds and he commanded great respect. His neighbour, a musician himself, became jealous and set afloat several rumours regarding this musician which in course of time so much upset him, as to let him blurt out the fact that Mother Parvathi was always with him. Consequently Mother deserted him as She had told him She would, in the dream. The result was that his concerts lost their fervour and he lost interest in life. The Prince, who was deeply interested in the musician, therefore had sent him to me with a request that I should take him to Bhagavan and see if he could at all be helped. Hearing this story Bhagavan told the musician to go beyond even the concept of darshan of Shri Parvathi although the musician could not at first follow what Bhagavan said. He remained with me for quite some time thereafter and would come to the Old Hall, sit in the presence of Bhagavan and sing to Bhagavan with fervour in the afternoon, even as he had done before. I told Bhagavan again of his plight. He left after some time, and we felt that there was a distinct change in the musician's way of life and attitude for the better, as he left. I have noticed the peculiar look Bhagavan would bestow on him after He heard his story and that look was on him all the time he sang in Bhagavan's presence. I believe that Bhagavan's grace had a lot to do with the change that was quite noticeable in him.

XX

HERE AND THERE

Arunachala fulfils a wish—Ascent up the hill—Astrologer at Banaras—A brush with Black Magic—Experience of courts—Kalicumbliwalla—Begum of Savanur—Music from the hill—A nonagenarian—The magic of the sari—A Queen's visit—A raw deal—Reincarnation—A Snake at my back—Nawab Salarjung—My father's death—Cases should speak—A mad boy cured—Experience with Lord Jesus.

Arunachala fulfils a wish

Mr. Mirza Raza, a cousin of Sir Mirza Ismail, was my landlord in Bangalore and had been of great help in the presentation of The Oriental Pageant, described elsewhere. When I was in Bangalore he was of great help to me. After I had settled down in Tiruvannamalai, I asked him to visit me there, but he refused having heard of my 'renegation' at Bombay. A year or two later I requested him to help me purchase a car for my use in Tiruvannamalai, as I had constantly to run about to Madras and other places in connection with ashram work and invited him again to my place to talk over my need. He came one morning and said he had come just for a few hours and took me to task for giving up my life in Bombay and taking to this 'purposeless' life, as he called it. That evening as I was going to the Old Hall, he accompanied me and was introduced to Bhagavan. He sat in front of Bhagavan, and his eyes were constantly winking in Bhagavan's presence. A little later I took him up the hill, which, I told him, was a sacred one and a wish fulfiller. He referred to the saying in Persian that one's wish would be granted even if it rained when the wish was expressed and asked if it would grant any boon that may be asked. On my replying in the affirmative, he wished to know if the hill was

such as I had described it to be. It was not the rainy season and there was brilliant sunshine. But almost immediately there were a few drops of rain followed by such a heavy downpour as to soak us both thoroughly to our skin. We ran helter-skelter to take shelter with Naina, then residing in a hut in Pilakothu. Rain ceased as we reached the hut. I told Naina what had happened. Naina said it was a truly remarkable and astonishing miracle. Had I told Bhagavan? It was then late and we were drenched. So I said we would do so the morning after, but even before I did Naina had told Bhagavan as early as 5 a.m. long before we went to the ashram. Mr. Raza gave this personal experience of the miracle of Arunachala wide publicity. Subsequently, he came on two or three occasions to pay his respects to Bhagavan.

Ascent Up the Hill

The story of Bhagavan, when up the hill, being bitten by bees as He neared the spot where Shri Aruna Giri Yogi is believed to be at *tapas* is too well-known to repeat here. That was long before I came to Bhagavan. This story was recounted to me by Naina one evening. I wished I went up the hill too. The next day as I went into the Old Hall, Bhagavan enquired of me what the matter was and Naina recounted the story he had told me and of my wish to go up the hill. Bhagavan gave the necessary permission, but Mr. Cohen who was there protested that I suffered from weak heart and it was not right for me to attempt the difficult ascent. Since Bhagavan's blessing was there I said I would go, come what might. A rather large party of us decided to climb the hill and preparations for our food and rest on the hill were accordingly made. In our party was an old lady, the mother of Mr. Bose, about 75 years of age, as also Naina and Shri Devaraja Mudaliar. All of us went up to the top of the hill. After some time at the top, the party came down to a flat rock below the peak and we had our lunch and rest and returned to the ashram at about 6-30 p.m. But before us all,

the old lady, Mr. Bose's mother, had left the party and come down alone to the ashram and told Bhagavan of our doings on the hill. As we entered the hall, Bhagavan asked about our experiences and said that all that day He was watching the clock on the wall timing us at the several spots on the hill but that He did not expect us to rest on the hill. I did not feel the strain of the climb, not only because I had Bhagavan's blessings but also because both Naina and Devaraja Mudaliar were always at my side to help me.

This incident recalls to me the experience that befell Naina who on hearing from Bhagavan His experience with the bees, decided to explore the hill for the particular spot and went up the hill with a party, equipped with food and other necessities. But a little way up the hill the party dispersed for some reason or other and they wandered about the hill and came back to the ashram quite tired and starving about 9-30 p.m. I record this incident to show that where we obtained Bhagavan's blessings, our endeavours succeeded in spite of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, and disaster overtakes us if we thought we could do better without Bhagavan's permission.

Astrologer at Banaras

I think the year was 1930 or 1932 when I was at Buddha Gaya. Mr. Jain, the Superintendent at Sarnath, invited me to meet a very interesting person. Treading our way through the several lanes of Banaras, he took me to a house planned on the old model, where I met a fine looking old man with about 25 boys seated opposite to him. After introductions, he asked me if I was at Banaras for *tapas* to which Mr. Jain said I was at it at Buddha Gaya. He was the court astrologer to the Maharajah of Banaras and he asked the boys who were his students to tell what my star was. None of them guessing right, he asked me finally if I was a Jupiterian. He continued and said I could not have got on well with my mother who must be very beautiful, with wonderfully long hair and big

black eyes; other details too followed much to my surprise—I was also a bit of an astrologer and palmist myself—and finally he told me that from childhood onwards I must have had acquaintance with great saints and, in view of the strong influence of Jupiter on me, I would meet a very great sage. I protested saying that already I had met several and would not leave Buddha Gaya. He put me a few questions, and closing his eyes for a few seconds said: "No, mother, you will be leaving Buddha Gaya soon." I inquired if he referred to Harilal Baba, but he said that the place where I would meet that sage was very far off from Banaras. I had then no idea or knowledge of Bhagavan and could never imagine that I would be drawn to Tiruvannamalai in the deep South. But that was how it all turned out.

A Brush with Black Magic

A friend of mine, himself an astrologer, told me of a certain gentleman in Dadar, Bombay, whom for the present we will call X, who could answer any question just on seeing one's face and that his fee was Rs. 5 for three questions. I was disinclined to see him but my friend insisted. I thought I would consult him over the scheme for the Home of Devotion, then under active consideration. One fine morning I just jumped into my car without telling any one, and knocked at his door. A person clad in a shirt and dhoti in the South Indian fashion opened the door and bade me come in. He made me sit on the sofa, and seating himself on a table, told me: "Well, your project is not going to be fulfilled." It took me by surprise for I had not even opened my mouth. He continued that my mother and my family did not see eye to eye with me and that I have a very handsome husband and gave other details of my life as well and asked me at the same time not to worry over these problems. He asked me not to waste my time here in India but to accompany him to the U.S. from where any amount of money could be had. I had asked him no questions, but remembering his scale of fees

offered him Rs. 10, when he ordered me to close my purse as he would take no money from one with whom he had a lot of work to do. He had assumed that I would join him in his work whatever that might be and to this day I have no idea whatever what it was that he had in mind. He took down my address and to my horror called the next day and sent word through the butler asking me to meet him but he had given no name. When I entered the drawing room I found him examining the photos there. He asked me to get ready to accompany him and although I stoutly declined, he continued to insist and it was quite a task for me to send him away. He came almost every day. When I used to sit for meditation in the morning at 4 a.m. his eerie figure would appear and stand by me. A sort of dread began to haunt me and I was afraid that my husband and family should discover the cause. I wrote urgently to my first guru Dr. Sehgal at Indore asking him to go over. He came and I put my problem to him. The first question he asked me was if I had had any food or drink when I met X first. I had then taken a drink from his hands. I introduced my guru that afternoon to X when he called and he was quite gruff with him and told him (my guru) that I was going to accompany him (X) abroad. My guru said that it was not possible. Thereafter my guru began to perform some *puja* every day and at the end of the *puja* he gave me holy water to drink. A week passed and my sister Mehra fell ill. I left to attend on her, instructing the servants that my movements be kept secret, particularly from X. He called at my place for three or four days but could not contact me. I was feeling stronger and was getting rid of my fright of X. It was quite a surprise when my niece, whom I had taken into confidence in this matter, told me that X was awaiting me in the drawing room of my sister's house, he would take no refusal and threatened to walk in and see not only me but also my ailing sister. He was making such a nuisance of himself that with a sudden rush of courage, I went into the drawing room and briskly

told him to get out and that very soon he would lose the power of mischief that he seemed to have. He left, cowed down by the tone of my reprimand and I never saw him again. I heard that due to drink he had lost this uncanny power he seemed to possess. I owe it to my guru that I could gather courage to put this man out of my life.

Experience of courts

Life's irony is such that while I had stoutly declined several loving requests of my brother-in-law to accompany him to the law courts in Bombay, I had willy-nilly to attend courts in Tiruvannamalai and at Vellore in connection with the ashram, and as these incidents have an amusing interest, I set them down here.

Rukmani and her husband Krishnaswami Muttaliar, claimed the right to perform *puja* at the *samadhi* of Bhagavan which gave rise to several disputes between them on the one hand and the ashram on the other, leading up to several criminal proceedings in which, although deeply interested, I was not directly concerned. Niranjananda Swami was then alive, and it was a special *puja* day when the couple went into the *samadhi* to perform *puja*. A hue and cry was set up, seeing that a woman was at the *samadhi* trying to perform *puja*. I went in although we were normally prohibited entry and pulled her out forcibly and slapped her, much to the surprise both of myself and of the several onlookers who were too afraid to intervene. This incident gave rise to some criminal proceedings against Venkataraman by them and I was summoned to court as witness. The magistrate offered me a seat in the witness box to which the complainant took objection but was overruled. The usual questions were asked and the parties who were sitting by their advocate were constantly goading the advocate to ask me if I had raised a sum of Rupees One lakh by way of donations from the public in connection with the Patalalinga Temple construction. This was objected to as irrelevant by both their advocate and

the court. Seeing that the party was eager to question me, I told the court that I was prepared to answer any questions and told the party that I had not spent even a pie for the purchase of a garland for the Governor-General, Shri Rajaji, and that all the expenses in that connection, not only of the building of the temple but of the opening ceremony as well were borne entirely by Mr. J. H. Tarapore and that he had saved me from going round with the begging bowl. Other such questions too were overruled, and when the question whether I assaulted the complainant was put, the magistrate asked the advocate, looking at me, whether he thought a lady such as I could ever be guilty of that charge. I could only laugh in my sleeve at the opinion of the good magistrate and tried hard to hold the innocent look on my face. After the examination was over and when the court adjourned, their advocate, who was tired of their impertinences and thrown up the brief, came up to apologise to me, but I told him that he did only his duty and thus we became great friends.

A sequel to this was that at a dinner party to Shri M. Bhaktavatsalam, then Chief Minister, I found this friend sitting just in front of me, and recalled this incident to the intense delectation of Shri Bhaktavatsalam and of the company present.

The other occasion was at Vellore where I was plaintiff along with others in the case filed by the ashram in the Sub-Court there. I was in the witness box and several questions were asked of the *pujas* that were being done in the ashram which I answered to the best of my knowledge, but as I felt I was being harassed with the details of the *pujas* that I could hardly have any knowledge of, I spoke directly to the judge and told him that all I knew was that *pujas* were being performed but could not give details of what they were or were not. Our advocate told me that I was to answer to the examining lawyer and should not address the court over his head. The judge however was kind enough to let me explain what I knew in my own way to him. I must say that on both the occasions when I had anything to do with courts,

whether civil or criminal, I was treated with consideration by the presiding officers.

Kalicumbliwalla

After Bhagavan's *Mahanirvana*, due to unpleasantness at the ashram, I made up my mind to go to Bangalore and was residing there in the house of my dear friend the Maharani of Mandi. She spared no pains to make my stay there very comfortable. One afternoon at about 3 p.m. I was surprised to hear a knock at the door and the servant usher in an young attractive man, who had wrapped himself in a black *cumbli* and had a turban of similar colour on his head. He told me that my stay in Bangalore was drawing to a close and that I would be going back to the place from where I had come. Taken aback, I called him in and offered him tea which was accepted. In answer to my questions, he told me that he belonged to the band of Kalicumbliwallas, that their guru was in the Himalayas, that they acted in pursuance of instructions from their guru, and that he had been directed to meet me and tell me that I would be called back and would have to return to solve some problems that had arisen. When I told him that I intended to stay on at Bangalore for some time longer, he simply laughed and said that events would prove him true and that the people who had made things unpleasant for me would 'come and fall at my feet.' It happened that I had to return at the insistence of Miss Merston and found to my great delight Shri Balaram Reddy, my good friend present at the ashram for a function. I was persuaded by the Manager to partake of the *prasadam* at the ashram on that sacred occasion. He told Balaram and me of his troubles with two old devotees of Bhagavan who were members of the committee of management and apologised to me for provoking me to the point of leaving for Bangalore.

This was my only acquaintance with the Kalicumbliwallas. Earlier a friend of mine, Miss Shakel, as English dancer and dancing teacher in Bombay, had told me of a similar experience

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of hers with one of this group. She was in Bombay with me as my guest and had an urgent message calling her back. She was hesitating considerably whether to go or not. When walking along the beach to Colaba to meet a friend, a young fair boy hailed her and would not be shied off. He told her, much to her astonishment, that she would be sailing for England on a certain date. She asked for details of the boy, who in fluent English told her he was eleven years old, and that he belonged to a sect of Kalicumbliwallas who, at the instance of their guru, were out to help people who needed it.

I recounted this story to the person who called on me at Bangalore and who spoke fluent Hindi. He told me that they were taken at a very tender age for training and had their *antharjñana* — inner knowledge — opened by the guru; that they were able to help people who needed help on orders from their guru who sent them on such missions. As I write these lines, the face of this person stands out before me, in spite of the long years that have lapsed since meeting him. What a calm, placid face, with light shining from the eyes!

Begum of Savanur

When I was at Bangalore, one night my friends the Begum of Savanur, her sons and daughters came to dinner. After dinner we were wondering what we should do. Meanwhile Begum's eldest daughter said, "Let us have a seance." I had already had the experience of this in London. I agreed, but Mr. Cohen was not for it. I said, "Let us sit and watch", so we all sat round a table. In a short while the table started moving. They were trying to summon their father Nawab Sahib, but they said some other strange man was coming. We asked them the name. To our great surprise the full name was Niranjananda Swamy. Mr. Cohen was surprised as he and I knew that they did not know anything about the ashram, nor knew such a name. So Mr. Cohen took interest and asked, "What do you want to

say?" Niranjananda Swamy said, "Please tell Mrs. Taleyarkhan to return to ashram; she is needed there and tell her to build the *samadhis* of Bhagavan and myself first." Whether one believes it or not, Mr. Cohen and I felt absolutely sure of the genuineness of message as these friends were absolutely not aware of anything of this. The beauty of the thing is, I did return to the ashram. Readers know by now that I did build my Bhagavan's *samadhi* in 1968, which was lying unfinished for 17 years. I finished it in 17 months only by my Bhagavan's grace.

Music from the Hill

Sister Lalitha and Maria, friends of mine, once wrote to me that they would like to stay for a period of 41 days for *sadhana* as instructed by a great person. I arranged for the residence and on their arrival took them to Bhagavan and told Bhagavan of the purpose for which they had come and that they had been told that they should be in the proximity of a great personage. Two or three days later I took them up the hill to a small flat rock where I used to sit for meditation. They accompanied me for three or four days to this spot and Maria would lie down on the rock for meditation. A short while after, Maria drew Sister Lalitha's attention to the fact that she was hearing notes of music emanate from the hill and asked if she too heard them. She did not. Maria continued to hear these notes for two or three days and at my suggestion, copied the notes in her copy book—she was an expert musician and this was no problem to her. No piano was available locally for her to play these notes; so she went to Madras and found that the music was beautiful and classic. Returning to Arunachala, she wrote page after page of the music she had heard. She fell in with my suggestion to go to the U.S.A.—she was a native of that country while Lalitha was British—and try to film that music. There she contacted M/s. Metro Goldwyn and informed me that they were taken up with the music and wanted a story written out for being filmed against

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that musical background. She asked for some books to be sent to her but for a long while I did not receive any acknowledgement from her. I wrote to Lalitha at Kotagiri and learnt that Maria had received the books and would be writing to me. A few days later Maria informed me that the project for the film was progressing. Not hearing from her for quite a long time thereafter, I made enquiries again of Lalitha only to be told to my great sorrow that Maria had passed away. I conveyed the news to Bhagavan. I did not know what had happened to her plans for the production of a film of Bhagavan and of Arunachala against the background of the divine music she had heard while here. Years later, the music from the hill was confirmed to me by a friend to whom a visitor from Sweden—Mrs. Vera Medenle—had said that while on the hill and on the *pradakshina* round the hill too she—who had no musical inclinations—had heard sweet melodies from the hill. Lalitha too passed away, late in 1967, I think.

A Nonagenarian

After Bhagavan's *Mahanirvana*, and the distress following thereon as also from the circumstances then prevailing in the ashram, I decided to leave Tiruvannamalai for some time and went to Mandi to which place Mr. Cohen too accompanied me. While there I was told that an old gentleman wanted to see me and would I see him? A tall, fine looking Punjabi Hindu, over 90 years old, came in and spoke to us of several matters and in reference to me said that a great power is behind me and protecting me, that none could harm or injure me in any way and any one attempting to do so would suffer for it. He asked me if I was Jupiterian and I answered 'Yes.' He told me some marvellous things about Mr. Cohen too. Then I was a bit anxious about the future of the Princes of India and asked him about it, to which he replied that they would one day come back to their own.

The Magic of the Sari

In my travels abroad, I have noted with pleasure the peculiar fascination exerted by the sari on the minds of foreigners, especially the Americans. In 1939, after my glorious scheme of the Home of Devotion blew up, I had been to the U.S. in company with B and her artist son J to see the World Fair at San Francisco. At Shanghai, we boarded the Japanese steamer *Asana Naru*, which was equipped with all the latest amenities such as theatre, cinema, swimming pool, etc. On board that steamer I became good friends with Mr. & Mrs. Hazard, one of the well-known multi-millionaires of U.S. and with the beautiful, if sad, Mrs. Williams and Miss Williams, wife and daughter of the Chief Justice of Los Angeles. The latter's story has been detailed in Shri Devaraja Mudaliar's *Day by Day with Bhagavan* and I do not propose to recall it here. Mrs. Hazard was quite a breath-taking picture. There were about 150 Americans on board that ship, some of them being poets and writers of repute. Viewing the World Fair at San Francisco, I thought it must be a replica of heaven itself, so fine was it. We travelled by bus from San Francisco to Los Angeles, seeing many beautiful spots *en route*. We saw the Niagara Falls which was lit up especially for us that night and then proceeded to New York to see the World Fair held there too. I am unable to say which was the better — the one at New York or the one at San Francisco. We had to reach the Fair from New York by train and every day we could see only portions of the vast grounds occupied by the Fair. We were enchanted by all that we saw. We were in New York for some time and on the last day were having refreshments on the grounds of the Fair, when to our table came a lady whom we used to meet in the Fair every day. We told her that we had planned to leave the States the next day by H. M. S. *Queen Mary* for England, when she asked if we had seen that part of the Fair called 'The Future World.' Being told 'no', she said we had missed the best part of the Fair and that our visit would be futile if we leave

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without seeing it. Over-ruling my companion's objections, I went up to the place where this 'Future World' was and the stalwart doorman there told us we could see it only after 7 p.m. when the exhibition opened and that we would have to skip it if we were to sail for England the next day. I asked to see the chief and he nonchalantly pointed the door to my right with his thumb. I knocked and went in. A handsome man at the desk received me courteously and on hearing of my purpose, told me politely that it was open only at night and it was not possible for us to do it on foot, since the show was arranged in such a manner as to be viewed only from the narrow gauge electric train driving up a rather steep incline, leaving no space for any pedestrian. Seeing me clad in the usual white sari, he asked me repeatedly if I was on a lecture tour. I said I was not and that I was an ashramite and explained to him what an ashram was. He said that immediately on seeing me he felt I must be a religious one, as I was wearing beads around my neck which too, I have noted, never failed to attract attention in the States and acted almost as a talisman. Again I expressed my regret at having to leave the shores of the U.S., missing the best part of it and spoke of my joy in coming to his beautiful country and of the wonderful and kind people I had met in my travels across his country and of the kindness of Mr. & Mrs. Hazard, who were my good friends. The mention of that name had an electrical effect on him, they being well-known as the Rockfellers. I told him that I had met them on board the ship and had become friends. My sari, beads, friendship with the Hazards, and the look of deep disappointment on my face all touched him. He called his chief engineer on the phone, told him my story over the phone and as we had to leave New York that very evening, could he make it and take us round the show? It was no easy affair to set the machinery working. Even as the chief was phoning the engineer, I closed my eyes and prayed to Maharshi — I was then not very well acquainted with him — to work the miracle. I said

He was on test and that He should make the engineer say 'yes.' The miracle happened, the engineer came and looked at us and said he would start the machine to show us round. I thanked the chief, who said that he too would be accompanying us around the whole show. Thus in the company of the chief and his engineer, we three saw the entire show from the train that was intended to carry nearly 500 carrying just the five of us. They explained to us in detail every part of the show and I was amazed at the imagination that had gone in the setting up of the show. Had we missed it, our tour of the U.S. would have been utterly incomplete. I was overwhelmed with the kindness, love and generosity of the Americans and thanking the chief and the engineer bade them good-bye. To this day I treasure their kindness with great love and joy.

A Queen's Visit

In 1961, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain was on a visit to India with her husband. Members of my community were generally at all times pro-British and on this occasion I was a bit concerned that Her Majesty must be accorded a warm reception all over India and return to her country overwhelmed with the affection shown to her by her ex-subjects. Discussing this with the Britishers then resident in the ashram, I thought of sending Her Majesty a photo of Shri Bhagavan along with some books that would give her information on Bhagavan. They protested that the procedure I had in my mind was wrong. But I went ahead and got from the ashram a good photo of Bhagavan and along with two books, one being *Self-Realization* by Shri B. V. Narasimha Swami and the other — I do not now recollect exactly what it was — was perhaps *Who am I?* I packed them nicely at home myself and addressed the packet to Her Majesty at New Delhi. In a separate letter I wrote to Her Majesty and told her of my purpose in sending the photo and the books and also of myself. Immediately on the receipt of these

books by her, then in Calcutta, they were acknowledged.

The acknowledgement was received by me when I was with two officials of the Government of Madras. In my joy I pointed out to them how gratifying and prompt the acknowledgement had been.

A Raw Deal

How many interesting experiences have come my way! I would like to relate one more. I was in Simla as the guest of a good friend of mine, when one night there was a knock at my bedroom door and whom should I see but the brother of my hostess, a Government employee. He related to me the pathetic story of his financial difficulties with a Pathan money lender, who was threatening to ruin his career and consequently his family life as well. I asked him to meet me on the next morning as I was going out for a walk and then he told me that it was quite a large sum that he was owing to the Pathan and that since I was rich, I could help him and that he would repay me in instalments. I asked to be taken to the Pathan and threaded with him the labyrinthine paths of downtown Simla to meet a stalwart Pathan seated on a cot in a dingy room. The Pathan was quite surprised to meet a well dressed lady addressing him in fluent Urdu. He told me that the debtor had been evading payment even of interest for quite a while and that he was determined to bring him to court unless he settled his debt then and there. He asked me — he respected me very much for intervening on behalf of one in difficulties although not well-known to me — not to evince any further interest in the matter. On the way back the person concerned wept and pleaded with me so pathetically that out of pity for his wife and child whom I had not met at all and who were then in Bombay, I agreed to give him the sum required. He promised to send the instalments he had undertaken regularly to me at Buddha Gaya but was remiss with the second and third even after reminders, and thereafter there were none! I did not mention this incident to any

one at all until a year later to my brother-in-law, my sister's husband, who, being highly influential, contacted the person concerned and told him of his faithless behaviour. He subsequently met me and said he had handed over a small sum to my brother-in-law and undertook to keep up with the instalments. But he failed again.

Reincarnation

Mimie was a Norwegian girl, vivacious, attractive and quite well-to-do. Driven by an inner urge to go to Paris, she secured her parents' consent and the first two days in that gay city were spent in seclusion and depression in her hotel room. The third day saw her sitting at a table in a restaurant alone, when to the next one came a handsome young man, who was an artist of good repute. The two were drawn to each other even at first sight, and after some hesitation, the young man drew close to Mimie and sought her permission to sit with her at her table. Falling to talking, they confessed that immediately on seeing each other, they felt they were no strangers but had known each other well and for long too. He requested her to accompany him to his flat in his car as he had something to show to her. At his well-furnished apartments were a number of paintings all by him, some of which had been purchased by connoisseurs, although he had no need to sell them to make a livelihood. Mimie appreciated greatly the quality of the paintings and he asked if she would like to see one of the paintings which alone had been covered by a beautiful curtain so as not to be immediately visible to the visitor. Pulling aside the beautiful curtain what should Mimie see but an excellent portrait of herself as she then was. The artist explained that the figure had constantly appeared before him, compelling him to paint it. He said that in earlier two lives of theirs they were lovers but there was a third one who too loved her. In the duel that followed in their prior lives, both the lovers had lost their lives. Mimie came to India on a spiritual quest and met me with a note of

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introduction from a common friend. She would not, however, tell me if she and the artist got married and left me guessing. One interesting thing that she told me was while sitting here at my residence, she saw me as a devotee of Jesus Christ. She was not the first to say so. Two others had told me so earlier. Mimie told me she saw me as a martyr in the arena of an ancient city and the description she gave tallied almost word for word with that given by a Bengali lady spiritualist and by an English lady. This description by these four friends was so exact that it convinced me entirely. Indeed from time to time I have had similar experiences. Whenever I had any difficulties or mental trouble, Lord Jesus would at once help me. Many a great help have I received. One of these boons was during my life's greatest crisis when I wondered whether I would be able to return to ashram at all.

A Snake at my back

It was the year 1945. One evening Mrs. Syeed and Soona were at my house and we were talking. Mrs. Syeed was giving us an interesting account of Kharbala in Mecca from where she had only recently returned. They were both sitting opposite to me and while talking, looked at me in a strange way. Both suddenly shouted out asking me to be careful, as behind me was a cobra with its hood spread out. I turned round slowly, and the snake could easily have bitten me. But it got off the chair slowly and went away. I ordered my gardener not to kill it. The incident created some confusion and noise. Shri Rajagopal, Bhagavan's attendant and my neighbour, then on his way from the ashram, came running. The two ladies with me were rather excited and told him of the incident. He asked me if I had killed the cobra and I told him I would not even permit an attempt to kill it. He immediately ran up to Bhagavan and recounted the story; the first question Bhagavan put to Rajagopal was whether I had killed the snake and he was told 'no.'

Bhagavan was pleased with the reply and said 'Very good.' He said that the cobra was my guardian and was protecting me. Early one morning as I got off my bed, I saw a big cobra skin peeled off just opposite to my prayer table. It must have got in through the open window while I was fast asleep. Mr. Anantanarayanan, then District Judge at Vellore and later Chief Justice of the Madras High Court (now Retd.) was quite incredulous when I recounted this incident to him some time later, but the next morning, when we were washing our hands at the porch of my house, after lunch, he saw the snake go by, his incredulity turned to belief.

Nawab Salarjung

Nawab Salarjung's father was a former Prime Minister to the great Nizam. Nawab Salarjung was our family friend. He met me at Bombay when he inquired about my life at the feet of my Lord. Years passed, suddenly one day I received his letter.

"Dear Sister,

Please inquire from your Maharshi the British regime is over and there is great chaos. I am terribly worried. Please inquire and let me know what I should do and what would happen to me and my state."

What was I to say. After reading Nawab Sahib's letter, Bhagavan was silent. I stood near Him for some time and asked again. What answer shall I give? Bhagavan said, "Do not worry, in no time everything will be all right." Immediately I replied to the Nawab Sahib telling him not to worry and that was what my Bhagavan had said. A month or so passed. Suddenly I did not know why on that day I switched on the radio, and what do I hear? Nawab Salarjung passed away. You can imagine my shock. Next morning I went to the ashram and said to Bhagavan that Nawab

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Salarjung died last night. My gracious Lord knew my thoughts and just said no more worry for him. Now well Bhagavan knew why he should not worry for a short time as he was destined to leave worry and everything behind.

My Father's Death

I used to hear a lot about spiritualistic seances and the wonderful experiences some people had. But I myself had the experience which I relate below.

In 1936 my father was ill with cancer. One morning a doctor came and gave him an injection, after which father lost consciousness. We were all shocked. My father died the next morning; we did not know the cause whether the doctor gave the wrong injection or what. This was our great misery and problem. In 1939 when I went to Europe, I was anxious to find the real cause of my father's death. I had helped one dear Dr. Nandlal Mehta to go to London for his F.R.C.S. degree. He took me to Mr. Foster, a well-known spiritualistic seance man. He made me sit before him, and asked me to give something of mine. I gave him my ring which he held it in his hand and in 15 or 20 minutes time he started talking. This took my breath away.

Several members of my family came. In the course of the seance my father appeared with one of my beautiful sisters who had died at the age of two, now a grown-up lady. Father said, 'I am happy as Vergees is also with me; we both are in rest and peace.' When it appeared as Guru Swamiji S. Saraswathi of Buddha Gaya, Mr. Foster said, 'A great old man standing near your right says he is very much pleased with your progress and he is watching you and is always with you.' He and my father and others were so very pleased and told me such things that Dr. Nandlal and I felt that the dears are not dead. They are more alive than we.

Cases should speak

A lady devotee came once. She could not speak. She had

no voice. The doctor said it might be cancer. The next day was Bhagavan's *Jayanti*. As soon as the *puja* was over, I took this lady to Bhagavan and took the *vibhuti*, put it in her mouth and applied this all over her neck, and said, 'You are cured.' I informed Bhagavan about this. She who could not eat or speak, ate and spoke. Her husband sent her a telegram to return immediately for an operation. She returned to Bombay and to the Doctor's surprise she was all right. She is still alive.

I write this because many people asked me why Bhagavan could not cure Himself and why He suffered. Bhagavan never suffered. He was far above all what we call suffering.

A Mad boy cured

Once a lady with her 15 year old son came. She told me he was her only son and that he was mad. She had tried everything; at last an expert in old palm-leaf astrology had said: 'It says you must go to a sage and spend 41 days with him. He will cure your boy.' She brought him to Maharshi. The boy had beautiful big eyes, nice looks, but he would tear off his clothes, throw away his food, run like mad, and he would not come even near Bhagavan's Old Hall. Slowly he and I became friends. One day I just took him by force near Bhagavan's Hall. He saw Bhagavan and started running round the Hall and would not stop. I told Bhagavan all this. He said, 'Let him be.' After three days, one day I pushed him into Bhagavan's Hall and by force put his head down. Then he would not stop and went on doing this. Bhagavan looked at him with such love and graciousness while the assembly in the hall was watching. In 25 days he showed marked improvement. By the fortieth day the boy became normal; he was very loving and obedient to me. His mother left the ashram thoroughly happy. After some years, Mr. MacIver and I happened to go to Madurai. We wondered whether they would allow us to enter the temple as Mr. MacIver was an Englishman. Just then an old man

came running and said: 'Oh Ma, how happy I am to see you. Come in. I am the *pujari*. I am the grandfather of that boy whom you helped to be cured.' So that way we had right royal entry to the grand *puja* of Mother Meenakshi.

Experiences with Lord Jesus

I have had a great many experiences with Lord Jesus. Only one example I shall relate here. I was undergoing great trials and mental sufferings about my leaving home for Ramanashram. In 1940, as usual, when I went to Bombay, it was a great suspense for me whether I would be able to return to the ashram. I had already told Bhagavan about it. One afternoon at my Marine Drive house with the agitated mind laid down, I had a dream that I was in a jungle and saw from a distance Lord Jesus coming towards me. When He came near me, I knelt down and cried to Him, 'Oh, Lord, do not leave me, help me.' He helped me to get up and started to walk, so I held His gown crying, 'Oh, Lord, don't leave me, don't leave me.' He turned round and said, 'Don't cry, I am always with you.' While saying this He walked away and disappeared. I woke up with great urge to go to church, and that very day I went to the beautiful church at Wodehouse Road. At 11 a.m. I went and saw all the doors of the church closed. So I went in from the side way between the convent and the church doors, and said a prayer, 'Let me see in.' As I was saying this I saw the church door where I was standing, to my great surprise, opening a little. I immediately pushed it and closing the door again everything was silent and wonderfully peaceful. I stood near the altar and spoke aloud. 'Oh Lord, how gracious you are, guide and protect me, give me strength and power only to find God, face to face.' Just as I was saying slowly the door near the altar opened and a young Goan father entered and seemed most surprised seeing me standing there. He asked, 'How did you come in?' I pointed at the altar and said, 'Ask Him.' He must have thought me mad, but looked at me

with most compassionate loving way. I wanted the candles, which I had brought with me to be lighted. He went in and bringing a box of matches asked for the candles to be handed over. I said, "Father dear, may I light them?" He permitted this. He put three before Lord Jesus and I asked him to put one to St. Anthony, one to Mother Mary and one to my beautiful Little Theresa. I am unable to describe the great peace and joy I had then. The Goan father stood looking at me. I called him and put both my hands on his shoulders and prayed to Lord Jesus to protect me and him and grant him the power to realise Him. The Father came and opened the door for me and out I went. My driver did not know what had happened to me. I was unable to walk. My body became so light. It remained so for three days.

EPILOGUE

I have narrated the story of my life in my own way. From my childhood I have had an idea that God is a beautiful lady-love. Therefore my prayer became Love. As I grew, love within me also grew. I was directed to the path of *Jnana marga*— 'the way of knowing who am I?' by my Guru Shyamananda Saraswati. When I learnt the teachings of Bhagavan Ramana and other saints too, I realised that the end and the result of the *Vichara marga* and that of Love is not different but one and the same. *To love all is to know all*. Love has been the keynote of existence for me in all my life. I feel it is a step towards heaven.

Real poverty is not the poverty of wealth but the poverty of good thoughts. Good thoughts represent heaven while bad thoughts hell. I loved Bhagavan not so much because He was a *Jivanmukhta* but very much because He represented the very personification of Love in its finest, purest and noblest aspects.

Where is that Maharshi who without impressing upon you the fact of the many miracles He performed without observing any restrictions in relation to the external mode of life like eating special food or fasting altogether, is being seen on occasions only or totally unseen, yet made you feel that He was a true Mahatma. Where is the Master now, who never even asked or ordered His disciples to do anything?

It was my prayer for ten long years' severe penance (*Tapas*) at Buddha Gaya that I might see God in flesh and blood. That thought was fulfilled when I had the sight of my Lord Ramana.

I hope and pray, dear friends, these pages will help many a suffering soul in their quest. I am humbly conscious of my ludicrously meagre knowledge and of the many limitations.

However devotion for my Lord Bhagavan Ramana has forced me as it were to write out these humble thoughts so that they may be of some help as a guidance and encouragement to the suffering souls.

AUM TAT SAT

AUM NAMO BHAGAVATE RAMANAYA

APPENDIX

Welcome Address to

H. E. Shri C. Rajagopalachari — Governor-General,
on the occasion of the opening of the Shri Patala-
linga Temple, May 14, 1949.

Your Excellency, brothers and sisters,

My revered *Guru* Ramana Bhagavan's blessings have made this day a red letter day in my life and in the history of Tiruvannamalai. It is my proud privilege to welcome Your Excellency, Ladies and Gentlemen, on this unique occasion. The temple of Patalalinga where Bhagavan Shri Ramana Maharshi performed *tapas* in His early days will now be declared open by Your Excellency. It is our good fortune that Your Excellency as the Head of the State guides the destinies of this land of ours, a spiritual home of Saints and Sages from time immemorial.

As everyone knows Shri Ramana Bhagavan was born in Tiruchuli. He was studying in Madurai. Then He got an inner urge to realize the Self. In His seventeenth year He got the clarion call from Lord Arunachala and left Madurai for Tiruvannamalai and reached the latter place on August 1, 1896. From that time to the present day He adorns this place and radiates light and love all over the world.

After a few days of His arrival here, He made the temple of Patalalinga His sanctuary and started *tapas* here. Some of the *bhaktas* visiting the temple had come to know of the young sage. They found that He was in deep *samadhi* with the lower part of His thighs bleeding, caused by insect bites. From that day the world recognized His greatness and began to pay its homage. After some time He left this for a garden, thence to Pavalakundru, to the Virupaksha cave, to Skandashram, and lastly He came to the present Ramanashram, after the death of His mother.

As a devotee of Shri Bhagavan, I had a great desire to make all these sacred places of His birth, education, penance and present retreat as fitting monuments for posterity to know and find true inspiration. The house at Tiruchuli where He was born has been acquired and Shri Bhagavan's portrait has been installed in it.

The house at Madurai where He first obtained the insight into Self beyond birth and death has also been acquired. The big temple of Mathrubutheswara has recently been built in the peaceful surroundings of Ramanashram and this will remain for all time as the seat of Light and Learning.

Just as I was trying to renovate the temple of Patalalinga I had to overcome a lot of obstacles and my grateful thanks are due to Shri Omandur Ramaswami Reddiar* who helped me a great deal. With his help and Your Excellency's blessings, I got the permission for renovating the dilapidated temple of Patalalinga. So far as the actual construction work is concerned, I cannot adequately thank Mr. Jehanbux H. Tarapore who very magnanimously came forward to finance and have the work done under his instruction and supervision.

We are really very fortunate that Your Excellency has been pleased to accept the invitation to come to this distant place despite multifarious State duties. We are very grateful to Your Excellency for the kindness. I request Your Excellency to please declare open the temple of Patalalinga.

JAI HIND.

Mrs. Feroza Taleyarkhan

The Governor-General opening the Patalalinga temple said:

I tender my grateful thanks to the kind sister who has brought me down here and to all those who have helped her in the least to attain her object by helping the restoration of this temple and in organizing this function. The Tamil public owe a great debt to her for this gift of love. May her wishes and prayers be fulfilled! The great and good men who built the temples, which are the glory of our country, expect us to keep them in order and, from time to time, restore such parts of them as breakdown under the stress of age. This is the least we can do to express our gratitude. Otherwise we shall earn the deserved inglorious, like sons who squander in dissipation their patrimony.

* He passed away in August 1970. May his soul rest in peace!

I thank you for what you have said about me. You have referred to me as the Governor-General. When we enter a house of worship, we leave our shoes outside and therefore, when I entered this shrine, I left my office at the *gopuram* gate and I am the humblest of subjects of that State of which He whom we worship here is the Head and Ruler. Mrs. Feroza Taleyarkhan comes from a people who lived in distant Persia. Her devotion and purity of mind should be an example for all.

Sardar Patel has sent a message which I shall read: "Please convey to Feroza Taleyarkhan my best wishes on the occasion of the opening ceremony of the Patalalinga temple. May it continue to serve the spiritual needs of an increasingly wider circle of devotees."

Shri Ramana Maharshi has kept India's spiritual glory alive in our generation. He had in His own way made the name of India respected by wise and enlightened men spread all over the world even as Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and other saints did in former times. Ramana Maharshi's meditations took early shape in this temple. Let us tender our tribute of reverence and homage to the enlightened soul and may His prayers, on our behalf, bear fruit. Let us be worthy of Him.

My stay here is brief and I have no time to give vent to my natural inclination to see old friends and have a quiet talk with them all. They are all in a mood of exaltation over the office that I hold. Their love is great but I am unable to sit and talk and give them pleasure. I hope they will all forgive me. They must remember that they cannot have it both ways; they cannot put me in high office and also enjoy my private company.

I find some people intrigued about my meeting with my old friend Mr. Naicker soon after my arrival here. The truth is this: Mr. E. V. Ramaswami Naicker wrote to me saying that he wanted to come to Delhi to meet me. But I informed him that he might as well meet me when I came here and this is how we met today. Some people even say that I have omitted to meet everybody else and met the person who led a movement which is responsible in these parts for so much trouble, confusion and even breaches of peace and which looked down upon established institutions and traditions. They might ask: 'Is it not folly?' Mr. Naicker and I are old friends almost of the same age and are old enough to realize the transience of things on this earth.

Sages, Saints and Arunachala Ramana

We worked together closely for many years. Later differences grew between us and these differences have not affected our friendship. I want people to copy our example. The interview had nothing to do with public affairs or about the movement or his public activities but related only to personal matters about which he wished to consult me. There is no need for people to indulge in speculation in this connection about the future of the anti-Hindi movement or the self-respect movement, or of Mr. Naicker becoming a Minister. Let me clear all misapprehensions and speculations in this respect. It is just a simple matter of two old friends meeting and you need not attach any other significance to it.

Mutual affection and regard are essential for the harmonious working of democracy. Government today in our country is by the people. There is no longer the authority of one ruler enforced by the power of the sword or bayonet. The Government is now by the people. It might be that the people have their shortcomings, such as ignorance, poverty and internal dissensions. Congregated in the temple of God as we are now, let us all unite in prayer to God to bless us with wisdom. Mutual affection will dissolve bitterness and disharmony, promote strength and help the growth of democracy in our country. Religion will bring together. It should not divide. All religions are harmonizing factors. We should develop the strength and religious spirit in us to make our religion a true cementing force. There need be no surprise to see in a vast country like ours with a great and growing population that people have differences or there is poverty and ignorance. Let us renovate our hearts as we have renovated the temple and recapture the spirit of our ancient *Dharma* and then our strength, unity and happiness will be ensured.

Governor-General's Camp, India.
Bangalore, 19th May 1949.

Dear Feroza Sister,

I cannot tell you how immensely pleased I am that I was able to fulfil your desire last Saturday. This memorable occasion will remain green in my memory. I am deeply thankful to you for

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the part you have played through the silent inspiration of Shri Ramana Maharshi in keeping religion before the people of the South.

Yours sincerely,
(sd.) C. Rajagopalachari.

Military Secretary to
Governor-General.

No. 38-T.S/49
Governor-General's Camp,
Bangalore, 19th May 1949.

Dear Shrimathi Taleyarkhan,

I write to thank you very much indeed for the excellent arrangements which were made in connection with His Excellency the Governor-General opening the Patalalinga temple on 14th May, 1949. Everything was spick-and-span and the function was successful in every way. His Excellency is fully aware of the great pains you took to make the occasion such a resounding success, and I can assure you that His Excellency is greatly appreciative of the thoroughness with which every minute detail connected with the memorable event was attended to.

With best regards to you and your sisters.

Yours sincerely,
(sd.) B. Chatterjee,
Colonel MSGG

Letter No. 140/53 dated 23rd February 1953 from Shri J. Bhatt, Joint Secretary, All India Arya (Hindu) Dharma Seva Sangh, P.O. Birla Lines, Subzi Mandi, Delhi, to Shrimathi Feroza Banoo Taleyarkhan, C/o. Shri Ramanashram P.O. Tiruvannamalai, S.I.

Dear Shrimathi Ji,

Your kind letter of the 12th instant addressed to Shriman Seth Jugal Kishoreji Birla was forwarded to him at Calcutta — where Sethji is at present — and he has asked me to acknowledge your letter and also to convey his *namaskar* to you. Shriman

Sethji has mentioned a grant-in-aid from [this] Sangh for a sum of Rupees Two Hundred and Fifty only per mensem, for a period of six months, in response to an appeal by Sadhu Arunachala. Accordingly I have sent a cheque for Rs. 1,500 (Fifteen hundred only) being the amount of grant-in-aid for six months to Maj. A. W. Chadwick (Sadhu Arunachala). Please ask him to acknowledge receipt of the same.

Yours faithfully,
(sd.) J. Bhatt,
Joint Secretary.

Letter dated October 14, 1967 from Shri J. Bhatt to me:

Dear Ma F. Taleyarkhan,

The great founder and patron of our institution, Revered Seth Jugal Kishoreji Birla, has passed away. He had great love and respect for you. It was because of your request that he had sanctioned a monthly donation for your *Veda Patasala*. But we regret to have to say that we have been hearing all sorts of reports against it. So, I would like to know from you as to how many boys you have, what they are learning, and what sort of teaching they are given. I hope you are still interested in this matter. If so, I would like to hear from you about the affairs of the ashram, so that we may decide further in this matter.

I hope you are keeping sound health.

With my best regards,

Yours sincerely,
(sd.) J. Bhatt

Letter dated 18th October 1967 from Mr. Arthur Osborne, Editor, *The Mountain Path*, Shri Ramanashram, to the Joint Secretary, All India Arya (Hindu) Dharma Seva Sangh, 25, Malkanj Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi.

Appendix

Dear Sir,

Shri Ramanashram Veda Patasala

A letter has been brought to my notice addressed to Mrs. F. Taleyarkhan by you, speaking of reports you have heard against this ashram and its *Veda Patasala*.

I may say that I am the editor of the quarterly journal, *The Mountain Path*, published by this ashram and former Principal of Shri L. N. Birla's Hindi High School, Calcutta.

I am sorry to have to inform you that the unfavourable reports which you have heard have their origin in Mrs. Taleyarkhan herself, who has failed in an attempt she made to gain control of the Ashram and now feels vindictive. Also you are not right in saying that because of Mrs. Taleyarkhan your institution had sanctioned a monthly donation for our *Veda Patasala*. It was due to the kind services of the late Major A. W. Chadwick (Sadhu Arunachala) who was in charge of the *Veda Patasala* that your institution was pleased to grant a charity.

I can personally assure you that the Ashram and the *Patasala* are run to the general satisfaction of the devotees of Shri Bhagavan by the legally constituted heir to the Maharshi, assisted by a Board of Trustees appointed on a scheme drawn up by the Sub-Court, Vellore. Further there is great enthusiasm and goodwill among the devotees of Shri Maharshi all over the world, as was seen last June, during the *Mahakumbhabhishekam* celebrations, an illustrated account of which is contained in the July issue of *The Mountain Path* which I am enclosing.

As for the *Veda Patasala* itself:

The main subject taught is *Krishna Yajurveda*, i.e., Seven *Kandas*, 3 *Ashtangas* and *Aruna Kadakam* totalling 82 *prachnas*. The course lasts seven years. Added to this (*Veda*), Sanskrit is also taught. The course prescribed is sufficient for a boy to write the entrance examination in the Government Sanskrit College. English is also taught, equivalent to nearly S.S.L.C. standard. The mother tongue Tamil and elementary mathematics are also taught.

Four old students have carried on their future studies in Sanskrit at the Sanskrit College in Madras and are now working as Sanskrit pandits in different parts of South India. Another old student who joined the Ayurvedic College also in Madras, has

completed his studies successfully and is now practising. Another boy has taken to *vaiddic* and is a *purohit* now. This year one boy was sent to the Sanskrit College and is carrying on his studies successfully. Of the four boys now studying in our *Veda Patasala*, two students will soon be eligible for higher studies in Sanskrit.

We are having considerable difficulty in maintaining the strength because of the general feeling that secular education is more profitable to the students. For that reason I can assure you that the Birla Trust is doing very valuable work in enabling us to continue in our efforts.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely,
(sd.) Arthur Osborne

Copy to:

Shri L. N. Birla
15 India Exchange Place
Calcutta 1.

Letter dated 25th January 1968 from the author to the Joint Secretary, as below.

Dear Sir,

I refer to letter dated 18th October 1967 addressed to you by Mr. Arthur Osborne of Shri Ramanashram, Tiruvannamalai.

I am only interested in the efficient and smooth running of the activities of Shri Ramanashram and in a spiritual institution there should be no malpractice and there should be no room for personal likes and dislikes. Unfortunately the existing state of affairs in the present administration of the ashram puts me to the necessity of writing this letter to you at least to give you a true and correct picture.

I took parental care of Mr. Osborne and his family in his early days in India and although I got him a job in "The Indian Express" Madras and again when he was at Calcutta, he has not been able to stick on anywhere and even now he is only a stooge in the hands of the present administration of the ashram.

I have spent nearly 30 years in Tiruvannamalai and collected money and spent on building the Big Hall, Guest Houses and only completed the revered *samadhi* of my Bhagavan on 26th December 1966 at the ashram. My resenting of the very unsatisfactory state of affairs in the ashram cannot be misrepresented as my attempt to gain control of the ashram. Files in your office will prove that I alone was instrumental in securing financial aid for the *Veda Patasala* from my revered brother Jugal Kishoreji. Mr. J. Bhatt is also fully aware of this.

I hope you have received my Souvenir which I have sent. Please go through this for my sake. I am sure you may be knowing Shri Radhakrishnan, Ex-President, Ex-Chief Ministers Shri Bhaktavatsalam and Shri Kamaraj and Shri Rajagopalachari; they will tell you all about me and the ashram management.

The *Veda Patasala* now comprises of only 3 boys of whom the senior-most is only 9 years old and the colourful and grand syllabus enumerated in Mr. Osborne's letter is not what it appears to be. In these days when money value is keenest, you will naturally wish that every pie is put to utmost and best use. In view of the contradictory reports you have received from me and Mr. Osborne, it is but proper that you should ask one of your own representatives to come incognito to the ashram and send you a first-hand report. In the meantime you may please suspend any financial aid to the *Veda Patasala* for you would not like to throw good money into "doubtful hands."

Thank you with love.

Yours very sincerely,
(sd.) Ma F. Taleyarkhan.

Letter dated 25th September 1965 from Dr. T.N. Krishnaswami, Mylapore to T. N. Venkataraman, copy to Mrs. F. Taleyarkhan.

Dear Venkitoo,

Your letter. I do not think it is fair and straightforward. You are trying to be clever to nullify the resolutions passed at the previous meetings. You are trying to take advantage of the fact

that the other trustee-members who have their own affairs to look after will not consent to come every day to the ashram and attend to the affairs of the ashram; and so you want to insist upon this as a condition so that they may say it is not possible for them and leave the entire ashram management totally in your hands as is now happening. We are objecting to your keeping all the reins in your hand, which is proving to be a strain on you and is evoking much criticism. If you are obstinate and refuse to share the responsibilities of the management with the trustee-members and other devotees of their choice, you will be defeating the purpose for which all the committee members have been working and you will be nullifying all the resolutions passed at the meetings and you will be reducing the other trustee-members to a state of mockery. On the meeting day, 19th September 1965, you expressed your wholehearted willingness to take our advice and act accordingly. Now I do not know who is advising you and prompting you to write these strategic letters. Mr. V. Thyagaraja Iyer came and told me about your letter; he also said that the responsibility of the ashram management rests equally on the shoulders of all the trustees and that Mr. Venkataraman (yourself) is an exception only in so far as he is a hereditary and continuous trustee and has a special casting vote; but for all these the trustees are on the same footing and all should shoulder the responsibility and bear the burden of seeing through the scheme properly carried out.

People boarding and lodging in the ashram are most of them men of quiet temperament and are afraid of you and feel if they incur your displeasure, you will make it difficult for them to continue there. The ashram is Bhagavan's ashram and has to be kind and charitable to the old attendants, sadhus, devotees and visitors. No person or persons may boast and take credit that they are doing all this. The spirit presiding over the ashram while our beloved Master was alive in flesh is also present now and must be allowed to do the work as it was working then.

Take the case of the meeting requesting Mr. Eknath Rao to take over the kitchen management. He was very much reluctant and desired that you should heartily invite him to do so, for otherwise, it would lead to complications and tension. But from the way in which things are happening and seeing that you have not

care to pay any respect to this resolution, and seeing that you continue to entertain harsh opinions of people who come forward to help the management, I think the main purpose of this meeting will also be frustrated; and that will be because you dislike it. Your letter probably means that because Mr. Eknath Rao is not a trustee member, he cannot take charge of the kitchen management. Has he not been chosen by the trustee members who have confidence in him? Do you want Mr. Srinivasachari or Chettiar should come and dance attendance every day at the ashram? I am sorry to write such a strong letter. This sort of thing is going on and on, meeting after meeting. You are establishing your stern control over the affairs of the ashram keeping out any one coming forth to help you, unless he be the man of your sweet choice. This is not rule by a committee but rule by one person. It is a shame that most of the resolutions are unheeded and unimplemented and meeting after meeting we find the ashram is relapsing into the same old routine with the same results and with no change effected. You have made the position of the trustee members very awkward. They have been very kind and indulgent with you. Even now they have your interests in their hearts. But I feel that they have not done their duty and on the other hand allowed themselves to be led by you and placed reliance on you.

This is a very well thought out and sincere advice to you. You should not try and canvass advice and opinion to defeat resolutions passed. You must take it in good spirit and adjust yourself and act accordingly to the advice of the co-members who are friends and well-wishers. You must welcome and invite persons to come forward to take responsibilities in the ashram management and you must respect and encourage them and stand by them. The entire ashram must be grateful to such people. They are the friends of the committee because they are the devotees of Bhagavan. You must stop telling them to mind their business and not to concern themselves with the affairs of the ashram.

This stern and one man's rule is only a strain on you. I do not know why you do not see and accept this. Mrs. Taleyarkhan and you have exerted yourselves and have collected large sums and you have no doubt brought the assets of the ashram to a creditable figure. But this is not the only thing for which the ashram stands.

We should try to make it an ideal place to spread the fragrance of the flower which was and is Ramana Maharshi. Please think calmly and well on what I have written. This is only the opinion and advice of one who considers himself a friend to you and admirer of the ashram. You are free to act as you like. I have not written this on the impulse of the moment. You will probably think that even 'doctor is turning to be unkind to me and is planning to rob me of my legitimate rights and powers.' If you think calmly and without emotion you will not say in reply, 'I will throw away the whole office and run away', for that will be cowardice. You will see that this letter which appears to be hard, unkind and unpleasant is in truth wholesome tonic for you.

Yours sincerely,
(sd.) T. N. Krishnaswami

Letter dated 24th August 1964 from Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami to the author.

Dear Mrs. Taleyarkhan,

I am glad you are back at the ashram. How is your health now and how is your mother? I hear that your place is practically a boarding place — a free boarding place — for all the foreigners. I do not know how much strain your hospitality will bear. But the point of this letter is that I now see clearly that the time has come for the ashram to make some *decent* provision for boarding and lodging visitors coming from distances who are decent and respectable people and who can afford to pay for their needs. You have always been insisting on this side to provide more guest rooms and more amenities for them.

I learn that the ashram food is deteriorating and poor sadhus who have no other go have to submit to this. This letter is private for you and I request you to study the situation for yourself for I may not be rightly informed. I am willing to come one day, let Venkitoo post a meeting of the committee and we shall make one more sincere attempt to make things better. Venkitoo is quite satisfied with the ashram collection and the routine running. He says he is not able to get the necessary stones to go on with Bhaga-

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van's *Mantapam*. I write this letter to express that I feel unhappy and request you to advise me as to how to achieve something without rubbing Venkitoo.

Yours sincerely,
(sd.) T. N. Krishnaswami

Letter dated 28th December 1968 from Shri Guru Priya Devi — Didi — to the author.

Dear Sister Bhagavan Priya,

I have received your letter and read it out to Mother. It was very rainy and windy before the 26th but by Ma's grace the weather cleared up on that day and the opening of the hospital went off very well, although Mrs. Gandhi's plane was late by an hour. *You can well imagine how much we missed you that day. We would have been so happy if you had been with us on that occasion. Your great love and regard for Ma and your spirit of service made it possible for us to build this hospital so soon.* Your booklet was given into the hands of the visitors. I shall send you photographs of the hospital as soon as they are ready.

Mother is here for a few days more. Her future programme is very indefinite.

With love and Mother's blessing to you.

Affectionately Yours,
(sd.) Gurupriya Devi

[Every letter from Shri Ma never fails to mention their appreciation of the very small service I had rendered in connection with the hospital. Compared to the work I did, the appreciation is out of all proportion, whereas for Ramanashram I toiled thirty long years!]

Letter dated 23rd December 1954 from Miss Merston to the author.

Feroza darling,

Many happy returns of the day to my dear Feroza, so may her ills grow less and her years go on and on. I am glad to hear that it is not cancer again but osteoarthritis though that is bad enough because it is very painful. But rest and treatment may relieve it a little. I do hope so. Anyway you can get about since you are going to Madanapalle and so long as you can do that life can be bearable especially with all your loving friends around you.

But Feroza darling, bury the hatchet, however much it hurts you, and come here quietly, incognito so to speak, to have Bhagavan's *jayanthi* with me — don't tell anyone but me that you are coming. I'll get your house ready for you — spend Saturday night and Sunday here and return on Monday to Bangalore. It would be a gracious act, and you would meet with much friendliness because they would realize that you came as an old friend only to join in the celebrations, not to interfere or rule. Or, if you don't want to open your house, come and sleep in Bose's house for two nights, won't you?

There are certain things I don't like here either — the greatly increased number of *pujas* and additional *Vedas*, but it is their temple management now, and the majority, the vast majority like ceremonies. I don't like Bhagavan's picture over the *Samadhi* either. The Bhagavan is His spirit — His body ugly and deformed was not the real Bhagavan, so why preserve an image of it over the real thing. The statue too in the big hall — but others like it — so..... I have yet to learn not to let these things affect me. I got into a furious rage yesterday over a never ending chanting — but saw how it was really my weakness that I was so affected by it. Another thing that I have to learn is that nothing can stay the same as when Bhagavan was present corporally, and so, the outward ashram cannot be the same. His is so rarefied a teaching, that only a few even in His lifetime tried it — most people were devotees on quite a different line from His — not seekers of liberation, but worshippers at a shrine expecting favours, without even His presence in flesh to remind them of His teaching. I see that if the ashram is to go on at all it must subserve the desires of the majority — namely focus on ceremonies and ritual which they want. Anyway the rights and wrongs of this are not our job, we

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just can't help it, it has to be, but we can go behind it and feel Bhagavan here as everywhere, and above all keep up the community of friends who were all together with Him here. As times go on we shall grow less and less in numbers and the community *qua* such is precious to me. I hate to see it broken up into factions. Darling, do come on the 8th. There will be great changes here soon, forestall them and be with us this *jayanthi*. Greetings to Cohen and best wishes for his new life, the old T.S. fold, truly better united to him than life here. I do hope he will be happy. Much love to you and a happy day tomorrow.

Yours
(sd.) Elizabeth

Wednesday.

Feroza darling,

All the same, please come on Saturday. Everyone will welcome you, all want you to come, just for the communion of saints' sake. Bhagavan too wants it or I should not have the urge to write and re-write begging you. Bhagavan evidently wants His ashram to continue on, or it would have died when *Sarvadhikari* went and through you he kept it alive and alive it is now. I don't think the ritual is being commercialized, less commercialized than in *Sarvadhikari's* day when money and power alone counted, and those who had neither were cold-shouldered. They are now struggling in the best of their lights with Bhagavan's grace to run it well, succeeding on the whole, I think. That I don't like ritual is neither here nor there. It had to go this way, I see that and accept it. You are right. But we need devotees like you of Bhagavan's day to gather around for ourselves and for Bhagavan's ashram, for His it still is. It helps others too to know that unlike other places after the leader, teacher is gone, it does not break up but remains a steady centre for His force. We may each know that He is with us wherever we are, but others see only the outside break and that is bad for them and for everyone. I wish the Mandis would subscribe again for your sake; they laid the stopping of their subscription practically at your door and I am very

distressed over it — not for the ashram, but for you, darling and for them.

Please, please, please come on Saturday. You don't have to go to the committee meeting, but just be with us in person. *All* want you, not for what you can do, but just to have you with us. When not at the ashram, we'll spend the day together either here or in your own house.....

It would be a very loving gesture from my Feroza whom I love more than a little. Wire to me and I'll meet you with the car. *Please* come, with Sam Sol or alone.

Yours loving,
(sd.) Elizabeth

MESSAGE OF LOVE

Love is the simplest and easiest of all the means of God realisation, for it dwells in one's own heart. One does not have to go into forests or roam from one sacred place to another to find love. Nor are *japa*, austerities, fasts and control of *prana* necessary for the attainment of love. Each moment love keeps throbbing within us, of its own accord. Every man has love in him. In his present state, his love flows in a narrow channel — towards his children, his family, his relations and friends, his work and his possessions. This limited love is to be made all-embracing so as to include the whole universe. This can be easily achieved by the grace of the *Guru*.

Love is the supreme end as well as the means of its attainment. Love is what makes life sweet, love fills life with delight. Love is bliss. Love is divine intoxication. Love is God. This universe is the manifestation of God's love. Love realises the essential unity in all diverse objects and beings. Love alone can perceive this entire universe as permeated by Lord Vasudeva or by Shri Gurudev. Life, without love, would be a mere void — dry, apathetic and cheerless. The true beauty and purity of life can be experienced only when the Deity of Love reveals Himself within one's heart. Love is life and also its highest objective.

No one is a worse sinner than he who spreads hatred in the name of love. All the differentiations of nationality, community, sect, political affiliation or religious doctrine are the ugly progeny of hatred. Love looks at everyone with equality. Love sees God in all human beings, in all creatures, in all objects. Love unites us all into one divine family. Love does not create barriers among men. Love, on the contrary, overcomes all differences and is constantly aware of the existence of God who is One, All-pervasive and full of bliss.

Love is without craving. Where there is desire, there is infatuation. Love only gives. That which asks is beggary. Love increases every minute; that which diminishes is not love, it is selfish attachment. Love does not depend on external beauty, nor even on high qualities; what depends upon such factors is lust. Love is a spontaneous vibration of the inner Self, which is unmotivated and absolutely independent. Love has no desire for personal happiness. Love radiates joy everywhere. Love is the

nectar of life and its highest meaning. He, who develops this love in him to the fullest extent, himself becomes holy; his presence sanctifies the earth.

Whom shall we love? First of all love your own Self. It is a mistake to consider oneself ordinary, inferior and helpless. You are an embodiment of God, nay, God Himself. You should understand your own greatness. You have been blessed with a nice body which is endowed with various useful faculties and powers; consider it a temple of love. Do not vitiate it by licentious living, sensuality, corrupt habits and lack of self-control. Do not enfeeble it by resorting to unnecessary austerities and renunciation. Love it for what it is. Then love your own mind. Do not spurn it thinking it to be like a monkey. Restlessness of the mind is its good quality because it is this restlessness which does not let you rest content with any worldly gain, however great it may be. This is the reason why you cannot remain satisfied for long with the petty and trivial things in life. It is this restlessness which propels you towards perfection because the mind can only rest peacefully when it attains perfection. Realise that you are the abode of God and then love others. It is foolish to regard the other man as inferior to you. Consider him to be as great as your own self—*Paraspara Devo Bhava* (Regard each other as divine). Thus enfold the entire universe in the wide embrace of your love and unravel the mystery of life.

Do not seek love outside but inside yourself. Experience, by the grace of the *Guru*, the dynamic force of Universal Love which courses through each nerve, each *prana* and each limb of yours. See the inner light by favour of the *Guru*. Realise the loftiest purpose of life by attaining supreme love. Thus achieve fulfilment for yourself as also for others.

I have met many such divine lovers, one of whom is Ma Taleyarkhan. In this book she has written an account of her life at the request of our former Rashtrapati Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, the great scholar and philosopher of our country. Ma Taleyarkhan is a pure and ideal Indian *prema-yogini*. She has spent many years with Shri Ramana Maharshi and is one of his close devotees. She has also met several great saints of India. From each, she has gathered the honey of love and love is what she gives liberally to everyone. I am confident that her book will elevate all the

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readers to the sublime heights of love. May her life-story inspire the readers with its spiritual message and fill their hearts with joy!

With love and blessings.

Swami Mukhtananda

MA F. TALEYARKHAN

DILIP KUMAR ROY

I stayed with Ma F. Taleyarkhan in her beautiful retreat at Arunachala when I went for the second time to pay my homage to the Sage of Arunachala, Maharshi Ramana. She was to me a perfect hostess. The Maharshi loved her as only he could love and her fulfilment as an authentic God-seeker was accelerated primarily by his blessing, even though she must have been blessed by many other holy men since she had been impelled to worship them since her adolescence.

Hailing from a distinguished family, she turned to Maharshi Ramana as her *Guru* with all the impetuous ardour of her high-born soul and served him from 1939 till 1950 with a moving devotion which is astonishing, the more so as she had taken refuge at her *Guru's* feet and become actually an inmate of the Ashram in the teeth of the opposition of her family and cultured circle of friends. Shri Aurobindo wrote to an English disciple of his that one of the most difficult hurdles for the human mind to cross is to be one-pointed. Ma F. Taleyarkhan achieved this feat with almost a regal ease, brushing aside *sans peur* the chorus of disapprobation of almost all who were near and dear to her.

I can well recall how she used to pay her childlike heart's offering of adoration at the feet of the Maharshi and how he was wont to accept the worship of her guileless loyal soul. I cannot find words to praise her unwavering faith in the Maharshi whom she adored all along with a single-mindedness which had to be seen to be believed. In the Gita the Lord has said:

*Ananyachetah satatam yo mam smarati nityashah
Tasyaham sulabhah Partha nityayuktasya yoginah*

Sages, Saints and Arunachala Ramana

which may be rendered in blank verse as:

*Who sleeplessly and in one-pointed love
To me appeal shall swiftly win to my Grace.*

I understand she has written about Maharshi Ramana in a book entitled *Sages, Saints and Arunachala Ramana*. She is surely eminently fitted for this noble task she has set herself, even though it is far from easy to bring out the greatness of so resplendent an Illuminate, a Saint-cum-Sage, as Ramana Maharshi. May her book inspire thousands of aspirants and instil hope in their hours of despair. Could there be a mission more commendable in this purblind age of growing nihilism which is the logical outcome of Godless materialism and scientific agnosticism?

June 1, 1970.

Dilip Kumar Roy



FEROZA TALEYARKHAN was born in, and married into, an affluent and aristocratic Parsi family. Not finding satisfaction in the high society life that naturally came her way, she started alone on a search for spiritual enrichment which led her ultimately to Shri Ramana Maharshi and later to Shri Ma Ananda Mayi. Today she is one of the chief figures of the Ramanashram. Her great faith in God and in her masters has helped her to meet all opposition fearlessly and keep herself calm and unruffled.



Orient Longmans

